DISOBEDIENCE AND DEFEAT

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AN ECONOMIC COMMENTARY ON THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

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This book is dedicated to

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who resisted political disobedience.

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INTRODUCTION

> *On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying, The* Lord *our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates.*
>
> DEUTERONOMY 1:5–7

A. A Shared Kingdom, Not an Empire

The Euphrates River comes closest to the city of Jerusalem about 326 air miles (525 kilometers) north of Jerusalem, at Aleppo in Northern Syria, and then 75 miles (120 km) east on foot. The river was far beyond families' walking distance for the nation's three annual feasts. The three feasts (Ex. 23:14–19) established geographical limits on the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant. They kept Israel from ever becoming a regional empire (Deut. 20:10–18).[1] The most that the rulers of Israel could expect from conquest was to receive tribute from cities located on trade routes north of Israel to the Euphrates.

God promised Abraham that his heirs would be given land all the way to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18). This was a statement of initial conquest, but it was not a promise of long-term rule. God mandated the sacrificial system and the feasts, which negated the possibility of a kingdom of Israelites extending to the Euphrates. The northern territory might come under the rule of Israel by conversion or by tribute, but the Israelites could not possibly occupy the land all the way to the Euphrates.

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1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48:C:2.

1. The Geography of the Promised Land

Prior to the conquest, God repeated this command to conquer all the land, from Lebanon to the Euphrates.

> Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be (Deut. 11:24).

> Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Josh. 1:3–5).

Rarely are these passages discussed in Bible commentaries. There is problem in explaining why the promise to Abraham could not be fulfilled. Yet God commanded the conquest after He had given the laws of sacrifices to the nation through Moses.

According to a passage in Joshua,

> Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof. Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you (Josh. 23:13–15).

He said, "not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof."

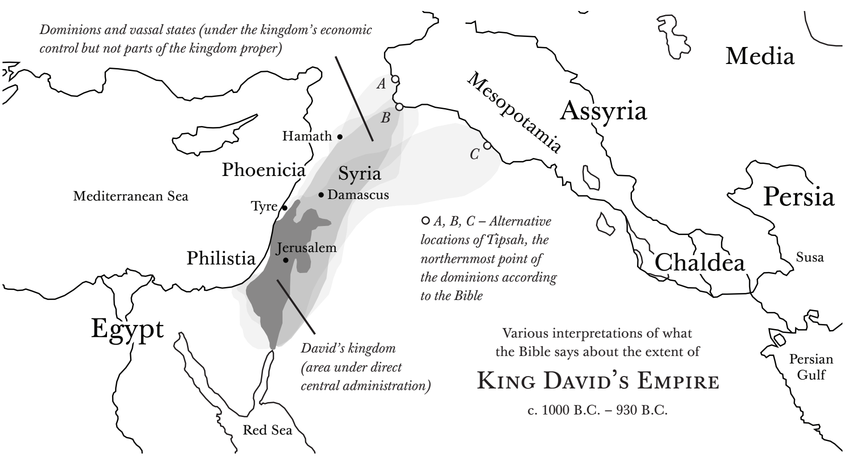
> When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them (Deut 7:1–2).

The Hittites were residents of the region around the Northwest Euphrates.[2]

2. The Feasts

Here is the problem. First, the Israelites could not occupy the land around the Euphrates and also obey God regarding the feasts. Second, genocide would have left animals in control over the land. But God never wanted this. This is why he drove out the nations slowly, so that the animals would not occupy the land (Ex. 23:29). Third, if fertile land was left empty, other tribes would migrate in. There would be new enemies on Israel's northern border. The warfare would be interminable to collect tribute. Fourth, Israel could surrender control over the land. But this would have negated God's promise. So, orthodox Bible commentators judiciously avoid discussing these issues.

We know that David fought to regain a city on the edge of the Euphrates (II Sam. 8:3). One proposed map of his kingdom places the far edge at the Euphrates.



This passage indicates that David's kingdom temporarily was restored to Joshua's territorial limits. But there can be no question of this: *Israel never occupied the land all the way to these border cities*.

The Promised Land was incapable of being occupied exclusively by Israelites, given the travel requirements of the feasts. There was

2. *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, rev. ed. Yohannan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, eds. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), map 43.

no way that a family could walk home to the Euphrates from the Passover (Lev. 23:5–8), held in Jerusalem, a distance of at least 400 miles (650 km), and then turn around and walk back for Pentecost, arriving 49 days after Passover ended (Lev. 23:15–16). Families at the Euphrates region would have had to rent housing in Jerusalem for two months a year. Their farms would have been left unattended. This was not economically feasible. Conclusion: either the three festivals were not required for all Israelites or else the Promised Land was suitable only for tribute.

It does no good to ignore this issue. This was a matter of ethics. Either the Israelites obeyed the laws of the feasts or else they failed to exterminate all the peoples to the edge of the Euphrates, for which God held them responsible. Genocide made sense only when followed by occupation. But it was impossible for Israel to occupy the Promised Land.

3. Replacement Tribes

There was no question that genocide was mandated. But this meant that the Israelites would have to bring in new tribes and place them under tribute, just as the Assyrians and Babylonians did with the Promised Land eight centuries after the conquest. The Promised Land would become an empire that would have to be defended militarily, unless the Israelites actively evangelized the new tribes. But they could not adopt them, for that would have placed them under the laws of the festivals. So, the converts would have to be gentiles. They could worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but they would not be part of the covenant line biologically or through adoption into the tribes. To maintain legal title to the Promised Land, the Israelites would have to act as evangelists to gentiles, and also let the gentiles remain as covenant-keepers inside the land, but outside the festival laws. The kingdom of God would be extended confessionally, but not ritually.

The newcomers were to become as the Samaritans became eight centuries later, but without discrimination against them. The newcomers would be judicially suitable as residents of the land, yet not as Israelites. They would not be under the seed laws, the land laws, and the priestly laws. They would be under the cross-boundary laws.[3]

3. On the four-fold categories of the Mosaic law, see Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Conclusion.

They would swear loyalty to God, but they would not be members of the tribes. They would therefore not be required to make the journey to Jerusalem for the festivals.

The Israelites did not exterminate God's enemies, as required. They placed them under tribute. This converted Israel into an empire. God had not intended Israel to be an empire.

B. A Catalogue of Failures

The historical books on the Old Testament, Joshua to Esther, are a detailed catalogue of their failures. Theirs was a failure of ethics. It was also a failure of nerve. The brightest spot in this entire section of the Bible was Esther's courage in going before the king to ask him to throw a party for Haman (Esth. 5). Only later did she inform him about her own covenantal/genetic origins.

> Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage (Esth. 7:3–4).

She saved the Jews from destruction, but it had taken her uncle's warning to force her hand.

> Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esth. 4:13–14)

The story of the kingdom of priests, from Exodus 19 until the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, was a story of ethical rebellion. They had sworn allegiance to God at Sinai, on the basis of His promise to them nationally. "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:6). This special status ended in A.D. 70.[4]

> Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto

4. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

> you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:42–43).

Peter wrote to gentiles living outside the land of Israel (I Peter 1:1). He told them of their inheritance.

> But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (I Peter 2:9).

Conclusion

It should have been clear to the Israelites at Joshua's death that they were not going to receive God's promised blessing with respect to territory—not without a change of heart. They did not obey God regarding genocide. They did not obey God regarding what was an inescapably aspect of the festivals: shared land, shared gospel, and shared kingdom. Rather than bring the replacement tribes under God, nearby nations would place them under tribute. They would come under God's sanctions.

> But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:17–20).

They did not choose life. They repeatedly chose death. The historical books record the details of these choices.

Israel did not obey God. The nation therefore suffered continual setbacks: military, economic, and political. The nation chose disobedience over growth, negative sanctions over positive sanctions. The story of Israel is the story of corporate covenant-breaking. It is therefore the story of corporate defeat.

INTRODUCTION TO JOSHUA

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

JOSHUA 4:23–24

If I were to write a stand-alone commentary on Joshua, I would call it *Conquest and Dominion*. The conquest of Canaan produced *the central economic event of Mosaic covenant Israel: the initial distribution of the land*. The exodus was the central liturgical event, for it established the Passover. But it was not the central economic event.

A. Israel's Central Economic Event

The conquest was the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16).[1] That promise was given 470 years before the Israelites crossed over the Jordan River. From Abraham to the exodus was 430 years. "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal. 3:17). Then came 40 years of wandering. "For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD sware that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey" (Josh. 5:6).

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

How long did it take them to conquer Canaan? Seven years. We know this because of explicit chronology. "And the space in which we came from Kadesh-barnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them" (Deut. 2:14). At Kadesh-barnea, Caleb and Joshua testified to the nation's readiness to conquer Canaan. The 10 other spies rejected this assessment. Caleb was 40 years old at that time.

> Then the children of Judah came unto Joshua in Gilgal: and Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite said unto him, Thou knowest the thing that the LORD said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea. Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh-barnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart (Josh. 14:6–7).

> And now, behold, the LORD hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the LORD spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old (Josh. 14:10).

By subtracting 38 years from 45 years, we get seven years. When Caleb came to Joshua to ask for specific territory (Josh. 14:12), this was seven years after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River. This was 475 years after God's promise to Abraham.

B. Inheritance and Disinheritance

God's promise to Abraham was a promise of inheritance. But, because the land was occupied and would remain occupied in the interim, it was also a promise of disinheritance. The Amorites would be dispossessed.

Joshua oversaw the distribution of the Promised Land. This distribution became the central economic event in Israel's history. The laws governing the inheritance of these plots of land are known collectively as the law of the jubilee (Lev. 25).[2] Rural land had to be returned to the heirs of the original owners every 49 years. This set a time limit on collateralized debt. The collateral had to be returned. It also set a time limit on Hebrew servitude, unless servitude was for payment of restitution by a criminal.

Jesus announced the beginning of His ministry by announcing

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), chaps. 23–31.

His fulfillment of the jubilee. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18–19).[3] By that time, the jubilee law was no longer enforced, assuming that it ever was. There is no biblical evidence that it was ever enforced. The Romans surely did not enforce it. The jubilees finally ended with the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman army in A.D. 70.

So, Israel's system of inheritance began with a conquest and ended with a conquest. It began with the near-genocide of Israel's enemies and ended with the destruction of the Israelite nation. The Romans dispersed the Jews throughout the empire after the second rebellion, Bar Kochba's, in A.D. 133–35.

The Mosaic Covenant extended from the nation's covenant with God at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19)[4] until the fall of Jerusalem. Jesus had announced the transfer of Israel's inheritance to the church. "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43).

The legal foundation of Israel's conquest of Canaan was the Abramic Covenant (Gen. 15). This was renewed by the nation at Sinai. But this was more than covenant renewal. A new covenant sign had been added on the night before the exodus: Passover. God then gave a new legal order to Israel (Ex. 20–23). This established the Mosaic law. The nation was told by Moses and Joshua to conquer in the name of this law. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

Then, after the rebellion of the golden calf, Israel was given a new priesthood: the Levites. "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout

3. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 6.

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men" (Ex. 32:26–28). This confirmed the Mosaic Covenant. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). To maintain the kingdom grant, the Israelites had to keep the Mosaic law.

Conclusion

The conquest established the starting date for the sabbath year (Lev. 25:1–7) and the jubilee year. Joshua led them militarily. After the conquest, Joshua distributed the spoils: land and cities. This inheritance mandated the disinheritance of the Amorites. It mandated genocide.

Genocide was the judicial, ethical, and historical foundation of the jubilee land laws. This is never mentioned by left-wing Christians who propose some sort of government-mandated wealth-redistribution scheme for the modern world. Nor is it mentioned by right-wing Christians who propose some sort of government-mandated debt-cancellation scheme. The jubilee law had its origin in the genocide of the conquest. It ceased to be a legal requirement with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

1

OBEY AND GROW RICH

Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

JOSHUA 1:6–8

The theocentric principle here is the covenantal foundation of prosperity in the lives of covenant-keepers. God promises to bless those who obey His Bible-revealed law. He says that the book of the law must be the focus of Joshua's life, for he is the representative of the nation.

A. Moses' Last Testament

Moses had instructed the nation just prior to his reading of the Ten Commandments to the conquest generation.

> Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess (Deut. 5:32–33).[1]

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 13.

Just prior to his death, Moses spoke one last time to the nation. He prophesied regarding what was about to begin on the far side of the Jordan River.

> The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said. And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed. And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you. Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.
>
> And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it (Deut. 31:3–7).[2]

B. The Need for Courage and Biblical Law

Courage is basic to covenantal success. So is biblical law. He who wishes to succeed must believe that God stands behind him and over him in his endeavors. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).[3] The covenantal foundation of this confident New Covenant faith is found in these Old Covenant passages.

Courage here was military courage. The nation was about to inherit the Promised Land. This had been God's promise to Abram 470 years earlier.[4] "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16).[5] Joshua's generation was the fourth generation.[6]

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2. *Ibid*., ch. 74.

3. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 30.

4. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3:16–18).

5. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

6. "The son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel" (I Chron.

There must also be a legal structure. This is basic to the biblical covenant: point three.[7] The positive sanctions of longevity (Deut. 5:33), military victory (Deut. 31:3–5), and prosperity (Josh. 1:8) rested forthrightly on the nation's adherence to the mandated legal structure.

It takes courage to believe that these sanctions are predictable. The covenant-keeper in faith launches new projects. He believes that there is a positive relationship between obedience to God's law and positive outcomes in history. Moses told the nation to believe this. God told the nation and Joshua to believe this. *Courage is associated with obedience to God's book of the law*. Courage that does not rest on faith in this predictable relationship between obedience to biblical law and success in history is courage that rests on a weak reed.

> And the Lord said unto me, Arise, take thy journey before the people, that they may go in and possess the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give unto them. And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deut. 10:11–13)

> There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us (I John 4:18–19).

> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (I John 5:2–3).

Moses told the nation to have confidence in their imminent corporate inheritance of the Promised Land. After Moses' death, God reconfirmed this in His instructions to Joshua. All of this is covenantal. It conforms to the five points of the biblical covenant model. A sovereign God (point one)[8] sets up Joshua as the national leader (point two).[9] He tells the nation and Joshua to be confident in the re-

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6:38). Levi was in the first generation, Kohath was in the second, Moses was in the third. Joshua received the mantle of leadership from Moses.

7. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 3. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 3.

8. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 1. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 1.

9. *Ibid*., ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

liability of biblical law (point three)[10] and the positive sanctions that widespread obedience to this law-order produces.[11] This will lead to inheritance (point five).[12]

Conclusion

God told Joshua what Moses had previously told him. Joshua had to be courageous in the face of the Canaanites. This confidence had to be confidence in the sovereign God of the Bible, who rewards obedience to His Bible-revealed law. Confidence in anything else is a snare and a delusion. Again and again, the Israelites trusted idols. The Israelites were at times quite confident, but in the wrong source of reliable sanctions in history.

Covenantal success in history is conditional. It rests on Christ's successful fulfilment of the Mosaic law's requirements (Matt. 5:17–18).[13] The Holy Spirit then empowers covenant-keepers to obey God's law. This results in prosperity. This is the Bible's prosperity gospel.

This gospel is denied by those who say that Christianity cannot triumph in history, not because Christians fail to obey God's law, but because God supposedly does not call Christians to exercise dominion in history by means of supernatural faith in Christ and also faith in God's supernatural ethical commandments. These skeptics include all humanists, all Muslims, and most Christians.

Addendum: The Prosperity Gospel

The phrase, "the prosperity gospel," is usually applied to a particular variety of Protestant charismatics. They teach that God wants all of His people to be economically successful. The secret of personal success is said to be the exercise of faith in the promises of God regarding one's guaranteed personal success in history. This gospel of success is not applied to Christian society in general. Rarely do its proponents accept the concept of a Christian society: Christendom. Most of them are dispensational premillennialists who reject the possibility of Christian society.

This teaching is not found anywhere in the Bible. God never tells His people to have confidence in their future success, if this confi-

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North ch 4.
12. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.
13. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 3rd ed. (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press, [1977] 2002).

dence is based on the intensity of their personal, individual confidence in the unconditional promises of God. *These promises are always ethically conditional.* God told Moses and Joshua that the basis of the nation's future military and economic success would be adherence to biblical law. They were to be intensely confident in biblical law and its historical sanctions, not the promise of prosperity irrespective of outward and inward conformity to biblical law.

The charismatic prosperity gospel relies too heavily on the concept of "think and grow rich."[14] This was popularized in the mid-1950s in American liberal Protestant circles and the general public by Rev. Norman Vincent Peale's best-selling book, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952), which sold tens of millions of copies. Peale was a pastor in a confessionally Calvinistic Dutch-American denomination, the Reformed Church of America, but neither his theology nor his book had anything in common with Christianity, let alone Calvinism.

The charismatic version of the Bible's prosperity gospel ("gospel" means "good news") is antinomian. It preaches confidence in the promises of God without reference to the ethical and judicial terms of God's covenant. God did not tell Joshua to have confidence in the inheritance apart God's Bible-revealed law. On the contrary, God told Moses, and Moses told the people, that they could not maintain this inheritance apart from widespread obedience to the book of the law (Deut. 28:15–68).

14. Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937). He was the author of *Law of Success* (1928), and *Success Through Positive Mental Attitude* (1959). He died in 1970.

2

ECONOMIC SAFETY NETS

> *And they did eat of the old corn [grain] of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day. And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.*
>
> JOSHUA 5:11–12

The theocentric principle here is faith in God, who controls economic causation.

A. Covenantal Transition: Inheritance

Joshua 5 is a chapter on covenantal transition. Forty years earlier, the Israelites had crossed the boundary of the Red Sea. They had wandered for four decades (Ex. 16:35). Now they had crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. This was the fourth generation prophesied by God to Abram. "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full" (Gen. 15:16).[1] The *geographical transition* was therefore a *generational transition*. "And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt" (Josh. 5:4).

To mark this generational transition, Joshua had the males circumcised. This generation had not been circumcised (v. 5). The third generation had not obeyed the law of the Abrahamic covenant in Egypt

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

or in the wilderness. They had not brought their sons under the formal sanctions of the covenant. This was Egypt's lasting reproach to Israel. "And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day" (v. 9). Then they kept the Passover (v. 10).

The text then says that the manna ceased (v. 12). Manna had sustained the Israelites for four decades. "And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna, until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan" (Ex. 16:35). That which had sustained the nation in the wilderness never appeared again. They fed themselves off the produce of the land as an invading army.

This marked the end of a set of miracles. Moses had catalogued these miracles in his second reading of the law. "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years" (Deut. 8:3–4).[2] God had suspended the second law of thermodynamics—entropy—for four decades. Now He reintroduced it into their lives.

B. A Safety Net for Ex-Slaves

I discussed the manna in detail in *Moses and Pharaoh* (1985).[3] I argued that the manna served as a transition out of slavery. In Egypt, the state had provided Israelites with food and capital. They had served others. Up until the return of Moses to Egypt, the Egyptian state had provided straw to make bricks. That changed when Moses and Aaron challenged the Pharaoh. As a punishment, the Pharaoh required them to gather their own straw (Ex. 5:10–11).[4]

The predictability of their lives changed at that point. It changed even more when they crossed the Red Sea into the wilderness. There would be no provision by the state any longer. God substituted manna.

Manna had unique characteristics. It appeared every morning, no

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2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 18.

3. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 18.

4. *Ibid.*, ch. 7.

matter where the Israelites made camp. It burned off every afternoon. "And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted" (Ex. 16:21). Every family had just enough for every member to eat. "And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating" (v. 18). It could not be stored overnight. "And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them" (vv. 19–20). A double portion appeared on the sixth day. "And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses" (v. 22). On the next day, the leftovers were edible. "And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none" (vv. 24–26).

The manna was miraculous, yet it was also utterly predictable. It was supernatural, yet common. It pointed to a God who sets aside the laws of nature for His own purposes. This is a God of predictability. This is a God of continuity in history. Yet this God of continuity delivered the nation out of Egypt by a series of discontinuous interventions into history. He is a God who is present in history, yet He is transcendent over history: point one of the biblical covenant.[5] He delivers His people: point two.[6] He is a God of law: point three.[7] He is a God of sanctions in history: point four.[8] He is the God of inheritance in history: point five.[9] The manna demonstrated all of this.

The third generation Israelites had been slaves. They were not yet ready to exercise dominion. Their children would be, but only after four decades of daily miracles. That generation learned about the predictability of the God who rules over nature. They needed this

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

7. *Ibid.*, ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

9. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

experience, for they needed confidence that this God also rules over history. Nature and history are autonomous man's two chief idols.[10]

They were not the only people who had seen this God in action. The Canaanites had, too, and they feared greatly. That was what Rahab told the spies.

> And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath (Josh. 2:9–11).

C. Removing the Safety Net

After the Israelites were circumcised, they celebrated Passover. That ended the manna. They had to learn new ways to feed themselves. They lived off the land. The land was theirs. It no longer belonged to the Canaanites. Thus began the transfer of inheritance from covenant-breakers to covenant-keepers. This transfer was by war and genocide. This was God's command. "And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them: neither shalt thou serve their gods; for that will be a snare unto thee" (Deut. 7:16).

> And the Lord thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the Lord thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them (Deut. 7:22–24).

This was a one-time only event. After they conquered the land, the rules of warfare changed (Deut. 20:10–15,[11] 19–20[12]). But, until the conquest was complete, they were to show no mercy. By "complete," God meant genocide.

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10. Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway, [1983] 1993), p. 11.

11. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 48.

12. *Ibid.*, ch. 29.

> But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: But thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God (Deut. 20:16–18).

The fourth generation had to take great risks on the battlefield. They were not to expect any further agricultural safety net. They would have to fight for their suppers. They would live off the land. They would take food out of the mouths of the previous owners, who had planted their crops.

> And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth (Deut. 6:10–15).

If they wanted to eat, then they had to kill. If they were hungry, then their growling stomachs motivated them to conquer another city. God would no longer let them enjoy a welfare economy.

Conclusion

The Israelites had lived in a welfare economy for four decades—not a welfare state, but a welfare economy. They had been sustained by continual daily miracles. This was not God's long-term plan for His people. He would give them capital in the Promised Land. "For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass" (Deut. 8:7–9).[13]

13. *Ibid.*, ch. 20.

Then what of the safety net? That net would be His law. "When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day" (Deut. 8:10–11).[14] If they refused to obey, the safety net would collapse.

> But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day. And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God (Deut 8:18–20).[15]

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 21.
15. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

3

SACRED WEALTH

And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.

JOSHUA 6:18–19

The theocentric principle here is that God has placed some assets under a ban: cursed. To violate this ban was to become cursed.

This command referred to the spoils of Jericho. As the first city to be conquuered inside the boundaries of the Promised Land, Jericho was under a ban. It was to be utterly destroyed. Only Rahab and those of her family members inside her house were to be spared. The city came under a curse. "And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent" (Josh. 6:17).

The gold and silver of the city would serve as God's spoils. These metals were to be made into implements for the tabernacle. As the conqueror of the city, God would confiscate everything of value. The Israelites, as His agents, would keep nothing. This was symbolic of their subordination to God. The city was conquered by a miracle: the collapse of its defensive walls. This took place after a one-time-only liturgical procedure: six days of marching one time around this city, followed by a march of seven encirclements on day seven (Josh. 6:13–16).[1] The walls fell, and the army invaded. "And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old,

1. There was no sabbath that week.

and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword" (Josh. 6:21).

Jericho's gold, silver, and vessels of brass and iron were off-limits to the Israelites. God set them aside for His purposes. That is, He put a "no trespassing" sign around them. He set them apart. This is the meaning of holiness: to be set apart. These metals were holy to the Lord. They could not lawfully be appropriated by anyone else.

This was unique to Jericho. It did not apply to the other cities. "And thou shalt do to Ai and her king as thou didst unto Jericho and her king: only the spoil thereof, and the cattle thereof, shall ye take for a prey unto yourselves: lay thee an ambush for the city behind it" (Josh. 8:2).

To violate a sacred boundary constitutes a profane act. This is the meaning of profanity: the crossing of a sacred boundary by a common person.[2] This is what Achen did. He became profane. He stole from God. He became cursed. That is, negative sanctions would soon be applied by God. The immediate result of his theft was the defeat of the army at Ai and the death of three dozen men (Josh. 7:5). Next, it led to the destruction of Achan's household by the community of saints (Josh. 7:20–25). The loot was buried inside his tent. Everything inside that boundary was profane. It came under the ban: total destruction. It became a mini-Jericho. The curse of Jericho extended inside Achan's tent.[3]

Wealth is normally common, not sacred. Jericho's wealth was an exception. It had been set aside by God, just as the forbidden tree had been set aside by Him. *It represented God's exclusive ownership of the land of Canaan*. It was His to do with as He pleased. His pleasure was in having His agents, including hornets (Josh. 24:12), destroy all of Canaan's inhabitants. *The inhabitants would be disinherited.*[4] Their possessions would be inherited by the Israelites. But, to secure their legal claim to this inheritance, the Israelites had to pass over the metals of Jericho.

Conclusion

The banned metals were representatives of both God's ownership and Jericho's position as cursed. That which was cursed by God became

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 6.

3. Chapter 5.

4. This disinheritance was a down payment on eternity. What God does with covenant-breakers in eternity dwarfs what He did to the Canaanites.

a blessing for God. To the victor go the spoils. The fall of Jericho representated God's sovereignty over all of Canaan. It was the first city to fall. He had the right to destroy the city. He had a right to the precious metals within the city. He demanded that Israelites acknowledge this by refusing to confiscate the wealth of the city as their own.

The total destruction of Jericho sent fear into the hearts of the residents of the land. God's agents showed no mercy. They could not be bought off. They had turned over the city's precious metals to the priests. The destruction of Achan's household, as a mini-Jericho, sent the same message to the Israelites.

4

REPRESENTATIVE EVIL

Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.

JOSHUA 7:11

The theocentric issue here is the doctrine of representation: point two of the biblical covenant model.[1]

A. Covenantal Representation

Adam sinned representatively on behalf of the human race. This is the heart of the doctrine of original sin. It is also the heart of the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (II Cor. 5:14–15).

Here, we learn of the cause of the defeat of Israel by Ai. How was it that one man's sin was regarded by God as having represented the nation? The leaders did not know. They had ordered an attack on the city of Ai, and the Israelites were defeated. About 36 of them died (Josh. 7:5). This caught Joshua's attention. Only then did God tell him what had happened. Then God led Joshua to the tribe, family, and household of the thief. The thief could no longer hide from the civil government.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 2. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 2.

> And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Josh. 7:19–21).

This had been a great temptation for Achan. He did not resist. He violated the "no trespassing" sign hanging above the wealth of Jericho. This cost the lives of three dozen warriors. Then it cost the lives of every member of his family (vv. 24–25).[2] His sin was representative. The negative sanction of death was imposed by God on the warriors and by the court on Achan's inheritance in the broadest sense.

B. Corporate Command

God had told the leaders of Israel what the rules were regarding Jericho. "And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD" (Josh. 6:18–19).[3] He told them representatively. They conveyed this information to the holy army.

The judgment on the warriors at Ai was a visible indicator that something was wrong. This is why Joshua prayed to God. He prayed the way Moses had prayed, when God threatened to kill the Israelites and make Moses a leader of a new nation. Moses said not to do it; it would diminish God's reputation in the eyes of covenant-breakers (Ex. 32:11–13).

> And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord GOD, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name? (Joshua 7:7–9)

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2. Chapter 6. See also Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus,* 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A.
3. Chapter 3.

The negative sanctions had been visible and compelling. This was the price God imposed on Israel to persuade Joshua that there had been a serious infraction of His law. Someone had profaned the sacred boundary around Jericho's wealth. This would stand against the nation unless it was dealt with judicially.

This had been a corporate sin. This was because God had forbidden anyone in Israel to steal the assets. Because the command had been given to all, a single violation applied to all. The warriors outside the walls of Ai paid representatively because there had been a representative violation inside the boundaries of Jericho, whose walls had fallen.

The doctrine of covenantal representation can also work against negative corporate sanctions. Consider Abraham's bargaining with God regarding God's plan to destroy Sodom. Would God spare the city for the sake of 50 good men? Yes. How about 45? All right. What about 40? Agreed. And so on, all the way down to 10 (Gen. 18:26–32). This did Sodom no good. It did not have 10 righteous residents.

Joshua inquired of God, and God responded. God blamed the nation because of one man's sin. Joshua was able to deal with the problem because he had direct revelation from God regarding the violation. He also had indirect revelation in the process of narrowing down the suspects. A post-A.D. 70 society cannot gain access to such specific revelation. Civil magistrates must rely on conventional means of inquiry. But the principle of representation holds. There are still representative violations. This is why civil governments must bring negative sanctions against convicted violators. This keeps at bay God's direct negative sanctions against the corporate community. This action by civil magistrates testifies to the non-representative nature of the infraction. What is representative is covenant-keeping.

Conclusion

The defeat at Ai warned the leaders that something was wrong. It was not a random event. Negative covenantal sanctions on the battlefield testified to a prior violation inside the community. God blamed the nation for the sin of one man. This had to have been a representative sin. The sin was Cannanitic. It was the theft of God's spoils on behalf of a member of Israel. It imported forbidden spoils into the camp of the holy army. This was judicially comparable to leaven during Passover. It would corrupt the nation. It had to be expunged. "Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever

eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land" (Ex. 12:19). Achan was cut off.

5

ACHAN'S SACRILEGE

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the LORD*. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the* LORD *shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones. And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So the* LORD *turned from the fierceness of his anger. Wherefore the name of that place was called, The valley of Achor, unto this day.*

JOSHUA 7:22–26

A. An Act of Sacrilege[1]

Achan appropriated forbidden objects in Jericho. These objects had been previously set aside by God for His temple. "But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD" (Josh. 6:19). This holy (set-apart) property is what Achan had appropriated. His was therefore an act of sacrilege. Sacrilege is a profane act, but a specific form of profanity: theft from a temple or a holy place.[2] Jericho

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), Appendix A.

2. The Greek word for "sacrilege," *hierarsuleo*, means "to rob a temple." Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 374. New Testament examples: "Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery,

was to be offered as the firstfruits sacrifice to God on God's fiery altar. The entire city was to be burned. Its confiscated treasures were to be set aside for God's temple.

Because of Achan's act of sacrilege, God killed 36 Israelites in the first battle of Ai (Josh. 7:5). They were not responsible for his act of sacrilege, but God nonetheless imposed capital sanctions on them. This event was later used by Joshua in his strategy to take the city of Ai: "For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them" (Josh. 8:6). Nevertheless, the 36 dead men were dead because of a sin committed by a man in secret, a man who was not a representative civil ruler in Israel. Judicially, why did God kill them? Because of Achan's representative position as a priest (Greek: *hieros*) of God in the national hierarchy (Greek: *hierarch* = high priest).

B. Achan's Priestly Role in a Holy War

In his capacity as a warrior-priest, Achan had committed sacrilege. Jordan's assessment is correct: "All of Israel were [*sic*] a nation of priests, and it is the priests who prosecute holy war. God Himself had established a parallel between the war camp and the Tabernacle, both holy places. . . ."[3] As a member of God's holy army, Achan had been ordered to bring burning judgment against Jericho. His was not simply a run-of-the-mill capital crime of a father in his role as father; it was the sin of a man who had personally appropriated forbidden objects that were to be set apart for God, i.e., *holy* objects. His disobedience was a priestly act. The nation burned the remains of Achan and his family. God's direct sanction against false worship by a priest was fire (Lev. 10:2); it was also His punishment for a non-priest who offered incense illegally (Num. 16:35).[4]

The crime of sacrilege under the Mosaic law carried with it a biblically unique degree of covenantal responsibility. The sanctions imposed by God and the state against this crime seem to have ex-

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dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit **sacrilege**?" (Rom. 2:22). "For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither **robbers of churches**, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess" (Acts 19:37).

3. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p. 93.

4. Prostitution was not specified as a capital crime in Israel, except when committed by a priest's daughter. "And the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself by playing the whore, she profaneth her father: she shall be burnt with fire" (Lev. 21:9). This indicates that a connection to the priesthood placed special restrictions on individuals, and violations brought a unique sanction: execution by fire.

tended to all those who were under the criminal's legal jurisdiction. This analysis in turn suggests that Adam's primary crime was also sacrilege.[5] He had eaten a prohibited communion meal by appropriating fruit that had been explicitly set aside by God. *Sacrilege was the original crime that brought all of humanity under God's negative sanctions*. Adam's sons and daughters have received a death sentence because of the sins of their father. This sanction appears to be a unique judicial aspect of sacrilege, both in Adam's case and Achan's.[6]

The penalty imposed by Joshua and the court was the public execution of Achan, his family, and his entire inheritance. Even the stolen goods had become polluted through sacrilege, and therefore had to be burned with fire, along with the corpses (Josh. 7:25). God instructed the people of Israel to do with Achan what they had been instructed to do with Jericho. Worse; not even the silver and gold were to be salvaged for the tabernacle. The fire would be all-encompassing.

C. Fathers and Sons

There is no doubt that God sanctioned the execution of Achan and his household, for He immediately withdrew His anger and His negative sanctions (v. 26). Yet the targets of this public execution were Achan's family members. The crucial question is: *Did they partake in their father's sin*? If not, was this execution in violation of Deuteronomy 24:16? That text announces: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin." Why were the sons and daughters executed for the sin of the father? The text in Joshua does not say that they knew of the crime, although they may have. It does speak of the burning of his tent. This indicates that the goods had been buried inside his tent. Those inside may have known what was going on. It is not stated specifically that some of the children were too young to know, nor does it state that some were old enough to be in their own tents. The point is, *inside the*

5. Wrote Sir Henry Spelman in the seventeenth century: "Thus it appeareth that Sacrilege was the first sin, the master-sin, and the common sin at the beginning of the world, committed in earth by man in corruption, committed in paradise by man in perfection, committed in heaven itself by the angels in glory; . . ." Spelman, *The History and Fate of Sacrilege* (1698); Eades edition (London: John Hodges, 1888), p. 1; cited by R. J. Rushdoony, *Law and Society*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Vallecito, California: Ross House, 1982), p. 33.

6. A fiery sword was placed by God at the entrance of the garden to keep out the sacrilegious priest and his heirs (Gen. 3:24). Achan's remains were burned (Josh. 7:25).

judicial boundary of Achan's tent, everything had been polluted. The tent represented the judicial boundary of Achan's authority as a household priest. Everything inside that boundary had become profane as a result of his unauthorized and self-conscious trespass of holy objects. Everything inside was fit for destruction.

Surely the animals did not know. Why were even the animals under his administration executed? What had these animals done to deserve stoning? They had done nothing more than the animals had done in Adam's representative Fall, yet they, too, had suffered the consequences, as have their descendants. A cursed form of death entered the animal kingdom as a judgment from God. The subordinates suffered as a result of their master's act of defiance.

Because the text of Joshua 7 is not specific regarding the knowledge of Achan's sons and daughters regarding their father's act of sacrilege, we cannot be sure that they did not know and understand what their father was doing. The fact that the family's animals were stoned does indicate that a comprehensive ban—*hormah*—had been placed by God on his whole household, irrespective of their knowledge or consent. If Deuteronomy 24:16 is accepted as a universally binding standard for Israel's civil government, then we must conclude that they both knew and understood. If they did not know and understand, then we must conclude that Deuteronomy 24:16 did not apply in cases of sacrilege. The text of Joshua 7 does not definitively prove one interpretation over the other, but the execution of the animals does suggest that *sacrilege was a unique crime* and therefore outside the judicial boundary of Deuteronomy 24:16 regarding innocent sons and guilty fathers.

The issue at stake was the conquest's judicial character as a uniquely holy war. God had directed the Israelites to destroy all the families inside the boundaries of Canaan. "And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them" (Deut. 7:2; cf. 7:16). They were not allowed to show mercy, except to Rahab and her family, since she had covenanted with Israel before the holy army entered the land. Once the army had crossed over the boundary of the land, no other mercy was to be extended to the inhabitants within that boundary. The normal rules of holy warfare did not apply. Israel was not allowed to offer terms of surrender to any Canaanite city, unlike wars outside the land (Deut. 20:10–11).[7]

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

Conclusion

By stealing holy objects in Jericho—goods that God had appropriated for Himself—Achan had not only stolen from God; he had also united himself and his family covenantally with Jericho. By stealing part of God's required first-fruits offering, *Achan became a citizen of Jericho*. He also became profane: the violator of a sacred boundary placed by God around the city of Jericho. He was therefore required to suffer the judgment of every citizen in Jericho: death. *Achan's covenantal citizenship extended down to his children and his property: the animals and the stolen goods*. Just as Rahab had become a citizen of Israel by hiding the spies and placing the red string publicly in her window, so did Achan become a citizen of Jericho by hiding the banned goods. Just as Rahab's family had survived because of her covenant, so did Achan's family perish because of his covenant. Achan and his family became Canaanites, and therefore the entire family came under the covenantal ban: *hormah*.

6

THE UNCLAIMED INHERITANCE

> *So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the* Lord *said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.*
>
> JOSHUA 11:23

The theocentric issue here is God as the provider of Israel's inheritance.

A. The Euphrates

God had promised Canaan to Abraham 475 years earlier.[1] "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). He had reconfirmed this promise to Moses. "Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Deut. 1:7). "Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be" (Deut. 11:24).

This promise had not yet been fulfilled. The Euphrates River (Baghdad) was about 600 miles east of Jerusalem. God's promise to Abram and Moses would never be fulfilled by the time that God's covenant with Israel ran out, when Roman legions conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70.[2] Why not? Because God's promise had always been

1. See my Introduction to Joshua.
2. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987).

ethically conditional. It had always rested on obedience to God's commands, including His law. The Israelites had not obeyed.

B. Insufficient Obedience

Israel was an army of 600,000 fighting men when it invaded Canaan.

> These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him (Num. 26:51–54).

It took 600,000 fighting men seven years to conquer Canaan. Even then, the conquest was incomplete. Numerous cities were never conquered. The Israelites let the Canaanites occupy their portion of the Promised Land. They taxed them instead of destroying them.[3] They violated God's clear commandment.

> And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth (Deut. 7:2–6).

God's command was clear: *genocide*. Nothing less would meet God's standards. The Israelites refused to obey. They substituted taxation for genocide. They concluded that having their civil government collect taxes was better than obeying God.

The ancient promise was not fulfilled. As it turned out, it would never be fulfilled. They would fall to conquerors from the Euphrates: Nebuchadnezzar. That defeat forever ended the political inde-

3. "And they drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer: but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto this day, and serve under tribute" (Josh. 16:10). "Yet it came to pass, when the children of Israel were waxen strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out" (Josh. 17:13).

pendence of Israel. The civil laws of Moses after that would never be enforced inside the nation of Israel.

They had been given the law by Moses immediately after their national covenant at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19).[4] This was four decades before the conquest began. They had disinherited most of the Canaanites during the conquest. They inherited most of the Canaanites' land when the conquest ended. But they subsequently surrendered worship and then territory to their enemies. This set the pattern for Israel from then until the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They repeatedly were seduced by other gods and other nations. They were conquered by their enemies. They were repeatedly occupied by foreigners in the days of the judges. Then the northern kingdom (Israel) was carried off by Assyria. Over a century later, the southern kingdom (Judah) was carried of by Babylon in the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Israelites were ruled by gentile kingdoms after a token number of them returned to the land of Israel from captivity: Medo-Persia, Macedonia, and Rome. They did not consistently obey God's law. Their courage ebbed and flowed. Their wealth ebbed and flowed.

C. The Division of the Land

The land of Canaan had to be allocated. "Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh" (Josh. 13:7).[5] This raised the question: On what basis? "All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee" (Josh. 13:6). The initial distribution was by God's supernatural intervention: by lot. The exception was the tribe of Levi. "Only unto the tribe of Levi he gave none inheritance; the sacrifices of the LORD God of Israel made by fire are their inheritance, as he said unto them" (Josh. 13:14). Levites received tithes on the net output of the other tribes' rural land rather than owning rural land themselves. "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their

4. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

5. Two and a half tribes had received their inheritance on the far side of the Jordan River. "And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about" (Num. 32:33).

service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Num. 18:21). They would inherit 48 cities instead (Josh. 21:41). This allocation was made by the casting of lots (Josh. 21).

Tribe by tribe, the casting of lots distributed land. "By lot was their inheritance, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes, and for the half tribe" (Josh. 14:2).[6] This was done under the authority of the civil head, the ecclesiastical head, and the tribal rulers. "And these are the countries which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for inheritance to them" (Josh. 14:1). When the allocation was over, Joshua announced: "Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward" (Josh. 23:4).

What principle of land distribution governed the falling of the lots? The people did not ask. God did not say. The section in Joshua relating to the distribution of land and cities is the longest section in the Bible devoted to one corporate event. It extends from Joshua 13:6 through Joshua 22:8. The text is detailed in its description of which tribes received what. This record had to serve the nation for centuries, because family rural land was to remain in each family permanently: the jubilee year (Lev. 25).[7] There was no system of longitude and latitude, no global positioning satellite system. This was as close as the Israelites could come to a precise description of tribal boundaries and captured cities. This became part of the Scriptural legacy, not just tablets stored in local archival collections. The records would persevere publicly down through the centuries.

There were local records of family plots. We know this because of the written arrangements that Jeremiah made with his cousin regarding the sale of family land.

> And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: And I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah,

6. Joshua 15:1; 16:1; 17:1–2, 14, 17; 18:11; 19:1, 10, 17, 24; 32, 40.

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

> the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land (Jer. 32:9–15).

D. Inheritance Requires Disinheritance

The Israelites inherited the land of Canaan. This inheritance was theirs on a covenantal basis. God told Abraham:

> And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites (Gen. 15:15–21).[8]

God gave them the lands of these peoples. The transfer of this inheritance was to be by military conquest and total genocide. The collective deaths of the existing owners would verify a legal claim that had been established by covenant 475 years earlier. The transfer in the inheritance was by covenant. This transfer was *judicially definitive*. It would be accomplished *progressively*. This process included a time of slavery in Egypt. That was part of the terms of the covenant. "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Gen. 15:13–14). The Israelites took the inheritance of the firstborn sons of Egypt, who died on the night of the first Passover. "And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required.

8. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

And they spoiled the Egyptians" (Ex. 12:35–36). *Finally*, Israel inherited. "And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat" (Josh. 24:13). The capital of rival cultures became Israel's.

This inheritance was a one-time event. Israel was not to become an empire. Different rules of warfare were in force outside of Canaan (Deut. 20:10–15).[9] Once the final disinheritance of the residents of Canaan was accomplished, Israel was to conquer by example, not by military power.

> Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8)[10]

This is disinheritance of covenant-breakers' property. The means of disinheritance today are two-fold: economic competition and spiritual conversion.

Conclusion

This section of the Book of Joshua marked the culmination of almost five centuries of hope. A people that had owned no land now owned it. They had long looked forward to this day. The terms of God's covenant with Abraham had not been completed. The nation would now demonstrate whether it would maintain its part.

> And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God (Deut. 8:19–20).[11]

The nation was supposed to extend its conquest eastward to the Euphrates River. It never attempted this or even mentioned the pos-

9. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 48.

10. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

11. *Ibid.*, ch. 23.

sibility. The Israelites gave up. They remained content to occupy a small slice of the Promised Land, sharing the land with a remnant of the Canaanites. God fulfilled part of His promise when He arranged the nation's transport to the Euphrates under Nebuchadnezzar. Most of the Jews remained in Persia, close to the Euphrates, after Ezra and Nehemiah returned to Israel. That was where they codified their oral tradition in the Babylonian Talmud, beginning in the second century A.D. until the late fifth century. This Talmud became definitive for Judaism. The much shorter and fragmentary Jerusalem Talmud did not.

Covenantal inheritance is always by disinheritance. Covenantal inheritance is a zero-sum game. The model in the Old Testament is Jacob's inheritance from Esau. Isaac told Esau that he had no blessing for him. The blessing had been given to Jacob (Gen. 27:37). Esau persisted. Isaac gave him a blessing of leftovers (vv. 39–40). This is what covenant-breakers receive progressively in history. They lose even this in eternity.

CONCLUSION TO JOSHUA

> *Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.*
>
> JOSHUA 1:3–4

The text is clear: Israel was to conquer land all the way to the Euphrates River, 600 miles from Jerusalem. Yet Israel never got close to the Euphrates River until Babylon carried the nation into captivity. Except for a handful of returnees in the days of Ezra, 9 centuries after the exodus, there Israel remained. In short, God's prophecy to Abram, to Moses, and to Joshua never came true. Why not? Because the promise had always been ethically conditional. It had always rested on obedience to God's commands, including His law.

When Joshua spoke to them in his old age, God's promise was visibly incomplete:

> Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward. And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you. Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the names of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day (Josh. 23:4–8).

He reminded the nation of the inheritance that God had provided for them. He warned them, as Moses had warned him, that they must

be courageous and obey God's law. This was how they would demonstrate to God and men that they worshipped the God of the covenant. They knew that the promise had not been fulfilled: "the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward." From the great sea eastward to the Euphrates, the conquest was not only incomplete, it had not even been attempted.

They were given the tool of dominion by Moses: biblical law. They were given land to serve as a covenant-testing place, even as Adam and Eve had a covenant-testing place in the garden. The remainder of the historical books are an account of their performance.

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES

Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.

JUDGES 2:16–22

The Book of Judges is the story of four centuries of failure. From the beginning to the end, the Israelites refused to follow God's law. They repeatedly chased after the gods of the land, the local gods of Canaan. God repeatedly brought them under judgment through defeat by foreign nations. They did not learn from this experience.

God still refused to drive out the Canaanites. He had already refused. The Israelites' army of 600,000 took seven years to exterminate most of the Canaanites, but even under Joshua, some Canaanite cities survived.

The Book of Judges is about false worship and political oppression. The Israelites preferred false gods to the God of the Bible. They

therefore showed a preference for tyranny over liberty.[1] Moses had made it plain that false worship would bring military defeat and economic losses (Deut. 28:15–68). The Israelites did not believe this. They did not believe it after four centuries of law-confirming negative corporate sanctions, from the death of Joshua to the anointing of Saul. Then they entered a new phase of nonbelief, which lasted until the captivity.

The Book of Judges has almost nothing relevant to say about economics. The one exception is the account of Jephthah's daughter. This account is unexplainable biblically without reference to one of the most obscure laws in the Mosaic code, the law governing vows to a priest.

1. James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985).

7

JEPHTHAH'S DISINHERITED DAUGHTER

Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon. And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

JUDGES 11:29–31

The theocentric principle here is that a vow to God must be kept (Num. 30). This is point four of the biblical covenant model.[1]

A. A Unique Vow

First, the Spirit of God was on Jephthah. Second, he made a vow to God. Third, God gave him the victory he desired. If the vow was foolish, then why did the Spirit of God direct him to make it? If the vow was immoral, the same question applies. Also this question arises: Why did God give him the victory?

What did he expect would come out of the door of his house? A lamb? A bullock? He knew it would be his daughter.

1. Burnt Offering, Votive Offering

What was the meaning of the phrase, "burnt offering"? It meant placing a dead animal on the altar of God (Lev. 1).[2] Is there any case

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

2. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd

in the Bible of such a lawful sacrifice of a human being? No. The Mosaic law said this: "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:21).

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch" (Deut. 18:10). God announced this through Jeremiah:

> But they set their abominations in the house, which is called by my name, to defile it. And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence (Jer. 32:34–36).

Then what did "burnt offering" mean in this context? It meant a permanent offering to God, a *votive offering*. A votive offering was associated with a vow to God. It was irreversible. The model was a burnt offering, which was irreversible.

To understand what was at stake, we need to consider one of the most obscure laws in the Mosaic law.

> Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation. And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels. And if it be from five years old even unto twenty years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten shekels. And if it be from a month old even unto five years old, then thy estimation shall be of the male five shekels of silver, and for the female thy estimation shall be three shekels of silver. And if it be from sixty years old and above; if it be a male, then thy estimation shall be fifteen shekels, and for the female ten shekels. But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him (Lev. 27:2–8).

The rabbinical commentators do not do a better job than the Christians in explaining this law, and the Christians are universally

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ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 1.

perplexed. It is obvious that vows were involved. Money payments were also involved. We need to answer two questions: What was the nature of the vow? What was the function of the money payment?

2. What Is a Vow?

To begin to sort out this pair of problems, we must answer this question: What is a vow? Biblically, a vow is a lawful invocation of God's covenantal sanctions, positive and negative. To escape God's corporate negative sanctions, there must be individual vows of repentance: covenant renewal. Covenant renewal involves a public reaffirmation of God's covenant: His sovereignty, authority, law, sanctions, and triumph (historical and eschatological). These are the five points of the biblical covenant model.[3] A lawful public affirmation of God's covenant always comes in the form of a vow. In order to set oneself apart judicially before God, one takes a vow. Vows necessarily involve sanctions. They are self-maledictory oaths that invoke God's sanctions, positive and negative. Formal judicial separation is based on a vow; it always points to God's sanctions in history. This is why holiness (point three of the biblical covenant model) points to judgment (point four).

The vows in this instance were ecclesiastical. The Hebrew word that describes these vows, *pawlaw*, is translated here as "singular." The translation itself is singular: *pawlaw* is translated as "singular" in the King James Version only in this singular verse. It is elsewhere translated as "marvelous," "wondrous," or "separate." Lawful vows are always out of the ordinary, and these vows were very special vows among vows. They were marvelous vows. The question is: In what way?

Commentators argue about the possible reasons for the placement of this chapter at the end of Leviticus. Why should a section on vows appear at the end of a book on holiness? Gordon Wenham wrote: "It is a puzzle why ch. 27, which deals with vows, should appear in its present position, since ch. 26 with its blessings and curses would have made a fitting conclusion to the book."[4] He offered two possible explanations, neither of them convincing.

I suggest the following explanation: the end of Leviticus marks a transition from a book that centers on point three of the biblical cov-

3. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, chaps. 1–5.

4. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 336.

enant—holiness, boundaries—to a book that centers on point four: oaths, sanctions. But what about part five of the book, inheritance? Here is the central theme of this passage: the loss of inheritance in one tribe in exchange for inheritance in another tribe.

The previous chapter, Leviticus 26, deals with God's positive and negative corporate sanctions in history. The move from an emphasis on point four of the biblical covenant—sanctions—in chapter 26 to point five—succession—in chapter 27 is appropriate.[5] Negative sanctions in the context of chapter 26 have to do with disinheritance. Chapter 26 presents a catalogue of God's corporate covenantal sanctions. Chapter 27 begins with rules governing a particular type of personal vow. This in turn raises the issue of covenantal continuity. Jordan wrote: "Payment of vows relates to the fifth commandment, as we give to our Divine parent and thereby honor Him, and to the tenth commandment, since payment of vows and tithes is the opposite of covetousness. Thus, this final section of Leviticus has everything to do with continuity."[6] The passage is where it belongs: in part five. The vow relates to inheritance: family continuity over time.

B. Devoted to Temple Service: Irreversible

The text does not tell us what stipulations governed this type of vow. The text also does not provide a context. This is why the commentators get so confused. The old line about "text without context is pretext" is applicable.

1. Addressed to Priests

The law was addressed to priests: "the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation." Whose estimation? The priests. Anything dedicated to the Lord is assumed by commentators to have been dedicated to or through the priesthood. The text is silent about the nature of the dedication; it speaks only of pricing. A gift of individuals was in some way involved, because specific prices are associated in the text with specific genders and ages.

Wenham discussed this law as symbolic of a man's willingness to pledge himself or those under his authority as temple slaves. The vow-taker could not really serve God in this way, Wenham argued. Access

5. James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), p. 17.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

to the temple was reserved to Levites and priests.[7] Once the vow was made, Wenham said, the person who had made it was required to redeem himself and any other people under the vow's authority by making an appropriate payment to the temple. These singular vows specifically invoked mandatory payments. "To free themselves from the vow, they had instead to pay to the sanctuary the price they would have commanded in the slave market."[8] Once made, the vow had to be paid. He cited Psalm 116: "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people" (Ps. 116:14–18).[9] This was David's affirmation of the law of vows, which stated: "But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee. That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the Lord thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth" (Deut. 23:22–23).[10]

We need to answer two questions. First, was Wenham correct about the exclusively symbolic nature of this type of vow? Second, was he correct about the payment as a substitute for literal temple service? Most commentators have agreed with Wenham on this point. I do not. I argue that the terms of the vow were not symbolic, and the payment was not a substitute.

2. Devotion: Change in Legal Status

In the case of heathen slaves, Israelites possessed lawful title to the slave and the slave's heirs (Lev. 25:44–45).[11] There is no reason to assume that an Israelite could not transfer ownership of his slave to an individual priest or to the temple. The tabernacle-temple already employed permanent pagan slaves: the Gibeonites. They were the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the assembly; hence, they were involved in religious service. This *permanent temple slavery* had been specifically imposed on them by Joshua as a curse: "Now therefore ye

7. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 338.

8. *Idem*.

9. *Idem*.

10. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 58.

11. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 30.

are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God" (Josh. 9:23). They were permanently set apart—devoted—for temple service. This was the result of their deception in gaining the vow of peace from Joshua (Josh. 9). The covenantal blessing—peace in the land—because of the Gibeonites' deception became their covenantal curse: permanent slavery under the priests. They had escaped God's covenantal ban of *hormah*—either their total destruction or their permanent expulsion from the land—but they could not escape His covenantal ban of temple servitude. *Hormah* (*chormah*) means "devoted." Its frame of reference was God's total destruction: "And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah" (Num. 21:3). A city devoted to total destruction was under hormah: a total ban. This destruction was a priestly act.[12]

I conclude that there is nothing in the Mosaic Covenant to indicate that pagan slaves could not be assigned to temple service even though they could not lawfully assist with the sacrifices. They were not allowed inside those temple boundaries that were lawfully accessible only to priests, but they still could work for the priests outside these boundaries. Thus, a symbolic transfer of ownership of a pagan slave to the priests is not the concern of this passage. The deciding issue contextually cannot be priestly ownership as such. The issue is also not the dedication or sanctification of household slaves. There was nothing special in Israel about the dedication of household slaves—nothing "singular." It has to be something more fundamental: service within the normally sealed boundaries of the temple.

Then who were the vow-governed individuals of Leviticus 27:2–8? They were family members under the lawful authority of the vowtaker. The vow was a specific kind of vow, a vow of devotion. Devotion here was not an emotional state; it was a change in judicial status.

3. Devotion vs. Sanctification

At this point, I must introduce a crucial distinction of the Mosaic law: devotion vs. sanctification. A sanctified item was set apart for God's use, though not necessarily on a permanent basis. A devoted thing was set apart permanently for priestly service or sacrifice. This distinction is based on the law that appears later in Leviticus:

12. On "hormah," see James B. Jordan, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Ministries, 1985), pp. 10–12.

> Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death (Lev. 27:28–29).

Death here was not necessarily physical death; it was, however, necessarily covenantal death. This meant that the devoted item was placed within the irreversible boundaries of God's ban. This form of *covenantal death* meant that the item was *beyond human redemption*. The devoted object came under God's absolute control. In many passages in Scripture, the Hebrew word for "devoted" (*khayrem*) is translated as "accursed" or "cursed." Such a cursed item could not be used for anything other than sacrifice to God. If it was subsequently misused—violated or profaned, in other words—the person who violated God's boundary himself came under the ban: beyond human redemption.

> And the city [Jericho] shall be **accursed**, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves **accursed**, when ye take of the **accursed** thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it (Josh. 6:17–18).

> But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the **accursed** thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the **accursed** thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel (Josh. 7:1).[13]

> But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been **utterly destroyed**, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal (I Sam. 15:21).

It is worth noting that this Hebrew word is the very last word that occurs in the Old Testament, in the passage that prophesies the coming of Elijah (John the Baptist), the man Jesus identified as

13. Because Achan had violated the holy ban that God placed around Jericho's spoils, he placed his whole household under the ban. It was legally possible for a father to place his family under God's ban—disinheritance from the family's land and legal status—through covenantal adoption into the priesthood. But in this case, Achan placed his family under *hormah*: God's absolute ban of destruction. As the head of his household, he went through an adoption process: not into the tribe of Levi, but rather into covenantal Jericho. Thus, it was mandatory that the civil government execute his entire household, including the animals, and bury all his assets with them (Josh. 7:24).

the last man of the Old Covenant.[14] "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5–6). This was God's threatened negative sanction: covenantal disinheritance—fathers vs. sons—that involved God's curse on Old Covenant Israel. As Jesus later warned: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:34–36).

The devoted item could not be redeemed by the payment of a price. It had been *permanently transferred covenantally to God as a sacrificial offering*. This is the meaning of the singular vow. The singular vow was a vow whose stipulations were irrevocable. The devoted item was placed within the confines of an absolutely holy boundary: beyond human redemption. The vow was voluntary; the resulting transfer was irrevocable: a singular vow.

4. Devotion Through Adoption

Could an Israelite lawfully devote his child to priestly service? Yes; as we shall see, Jephthah's daughter was pledged by her father. Once a person was adopted into the family of Aaron specifically or into the tribe of Levi, he could not re-enter another Israelite tribe by a subsequent act of adoption. He had been devoted to the temple: beyond redemption. So had his covenantal heirs. If I am correct about this, then in the context of marriage—another form of legal adoption[15]—there was no option for an Israelite father to buy back his daughter from her priestly husband by returning the bride price to his son-in-law.[16] Similarly, there was no way for a man to buy back himself, his wife, or his children from formally devoted service to God. In short, there was no redemption price for this kind of vow. This is why the vow was *pawlaw*: "singular."

There is no indication that a man could place his adult male chil-

14. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

15. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 31:B.

16. The dowry remained with the wife in any case; it was her protection, her inheritance from her father.

dren into mandated priestly service. An adult son was not eligible for compulsory adoption. He was a lawful heir to the land and the legal status of his tribe and family. He could not be disinherited at his father's prerogative. The crucial legal issue for identifying adulthood for men was military numbering. An adult male was eligible to be numbered at age 20 to fight in a holy war: "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD" (Ex. 30:13). At age 20, a man came under the threat of God's negative sanctions: going into battle without first having paid blood money to the temple.[17] Once he became judicially eligible for numbering as a member of his tribe, he became judicially responsible for his own vows. He became, as we say, "his own man." He became a member of God's holy army. A father could no longer act in the son's name.

C. A Disinherited Daughter

A daughter could not legally be numbered for service in God's army. Thus, an unmarried daughter could be delivered into a priestly family, as we see in the peculiar case of Jephthah's daughter.[18] Jephthah's vow to sacrifice the first thing to come out of his house could not legally be applied literally to a person. He could not lawfully burn a person, nor could the priests; therefore, any person who came under the terms of such a lawful vow had to be devoted to God in temple service.[19] Jephthah had made a singular vow. It was irreversible. This means that his daughter had to be disinherited.[20] She was beyond redemption.

There was a distinction in Mosaic law between someone or something dedicated (sanctified) to the priesthood and someone or something devoted to the priesthood. The former could be redeemed by the payment of the market price plus a premium of one-fifth (Lev. 27:13, 15, 19).[21] The latter could not be redeemed.

Disinheritance was permanent in Mosaic Israel. This could only be by covenant: specifically, by covenantal death. This is why disinheritance was a form of devoted giving. The head of the household

17. *Ibid.*, ch. 58.

18. I accept the standard interpretation of this story: she was not literally executed by her father.

19. Jordan, *Judges*, pp. 204–13.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

21. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36.

publicly gave his heirs over to God. He[22] publicly broke the family's covenant with such a person. There were only three means of lawful disinheritance in Old Covenant Israel: civil execution for a capital crime, expulsion from the congregation for an ecclesiastical crime, or adoption into another family or tribe. All three involved broken covenants: civil, ecclesiastical, and familial. In the third instance, the broken family covenant was simultaneously replaced by a new family or tribal covenant. A daughter was normally disinherited by her father in this way, and if she was to become a wife rather than a concubine, she was to receive a dowry from her father.[23]

D. Virginity and Disinheritance

Jephthah's daughter was disinherited in a unique way: by legal transfer into a priestly family. She bewailed her virginity (Jud. 11:37) because this was the mark of her unmarried condition, and therefore of her eligibility for transfer into the tribe of Levi apart from her own will. The standard interpretation of the story of Jephthah's daughter rests on the assertion that as a temple servant, she would have had to remain a virgin.[24] I am aware of no evidence from the Book of Leviticus or any other biblical text regarding the mandatory and therefore permanent virginity of female temple servants. Then why did she bewail her virginity? Not because she was bewailing her supposed future virginity, but because she was bewailing her present virginity. It was her virginity that bound her to the terms of her father's vow; otherwise, her husband's authority would have negated the father's vow.

Jephthah's daughter was, as the phrase goes, "her daddy's girl": a dynasty-coveting power-seeker. When her virginity cost her the inheritance of her father's political dynasty, she bewailed her virginity. Her heart was not right with God. What was an enormous honor—adoption into the tribe of Levi, the spiritual counsellors of the nation—she saw as a thing to bewail in the mountains for two months (Jud. 11:37).

Jordan raised this question: "Why didn't Jephthah substitute a money payment for his vow? These monetary substitutes are set out in Leviticus 27:1–8."[25] He said that commentators who have addressed

22. Or, in the case of a widow (Num. 30:9), she. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

23. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 32.

24. Jordan takes this approach: *Judges*, p. 210.

25. *Ibid*., p. 206.

this question have no easy explanation for it. He referred to Leviticus 27:28–29: "Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death." Thus, he concluded, Jephthah's daughter could not be redeemed. "Since Jephthah vowed to offer this person as a whole burnt sacrifice, we realize that he was 'devoting' him or her to the Lord, and thus no ransom was possible."[26] This is the correct interpretation.[27] But this answer raises a more important question: If she could not legally be redeemed from this vow of temple service, how could anyone be redeemed from a vow of temple service? If the answer is that no person could be redeemed from such a singular vow under Mosaic law—and this is the correct answer—then what are we to make of Leviticus 27:2–8?[28] What was the meaning of all those prices?

E. Not a Redemption Price

In the section of Leviticus 27 that follows this one, we read of the redemption price of animals that are set apart (sanctified) to be offered as sacrifices (vv. 9–13). Then, in the section following that one, we read of the redemption price of a house sanctified to the priesthood (vv. 14–15). Finally, in the next section, the laws governing sanctified fields are listed (vv. 16–25). In the second and third cases, the term "sanctify" (*kawdash*, holy) is used.[29] In all three cases, the redemption price was the market price at the time of the redemption plus 20% (vv. 13, 15, 19).

Then comes Leviticus 27:26: "Only the firstling of the beasts, which should be the LORD's firstling, no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox, or sheep: it is the LORD's." This law specifically denies the legiti-

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26. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–7.

27. Jordan pointed out to me that the only other use of *pawlaw*—"singular," as in singular vow—in the hiphil voice is found in Numbers 6:2, which relates to a Nazirite vow: "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk" (Num. 6:2–4).

28. North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 35.

29. In the first case, sacrificial animals, the cognate term for "sanctify" is used: *kodesh*, holy (vv. 9, 10).

macy of sanctifying the animal. This means that no redemption of the animal was legal. It was a devoted animal, not a sanctified animal. Sanctification in this context meant "set apart until redeemed." This legal condition was less rigorous than devotion. Devotion meant that the legal boundary around the object was permanent. The same is true of the vow of Leviticus 27:2–8. In this passage, there is no mention of a supplemental payment of one-fifth. This is evidence that what is being considered in verses 2–8 is not a series of redemption prices. Then what does this section refer to?

The preliminary answer was given in 1846 by Andrew Bonar. He concluded that the list of prices in Leviticus 27:2–8 is not a list of redemption prices. "There seems to me a mistake generally fallen into here by commentators. They suppose that these shekels of money were paid in order to free the offerers from the obligation of devoting the person. Now, surely, the whole chapter is speaking of things truly devoted to God, and cases of exchange and substitution are referred to in ver. 10, 13, 15. As for persons devoted, there was no substitution allowed. The mistake has arisen from supposing that this amount of money was ransom-money; whereas it was an addition to the offering of the person, not a substitution." He pointed to the case of Jephthah's daughter as evidence.[30]

Bonar explained the additional monetary payment in terms of the giver's gratitude. A person who was really grateful to God, he said, would add money to the transfer. This misses the judicial point. What we have here is *an entry fee*: a payment analogous to a marriage dowry. A person who desired to transfer himself or a member of his family into the tribe of Levi had to provide a "dowry"—not to the family, but to the temple.[31] Why a dowry? Because, theologically speaking, the bride of God is not a concubine. She is a free wife. The free wife in Israel had to be provided with a dowry. Judicially speaking, the Levites were freemen in Israel. For anyone within another tribe to become a member of the tribe of Levi, the person's family—the head of the household—had to offer an additional payment. This payment was judicial. It established the person's legal status: a freeman (wife) rather than a slave (concubine).

30. Andrew Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, [1846] 1966), p. 497.

31. This does not mean that the money could never go to the adopting family. Officers of the temple might choose to transfer the funds to an adopting family for various reasons, such as the education of young children who had been adopted, or the care of older people.

Members of the tribe of Levi could not normally own rural land outside of 48 specified cities (Num. 35:7).[32] Thus, any person who was delivered by a vow and payment into temple service lost his or her claim to his or her ancestral land. We see this in the case of Jephthah's daughter, in an incident that has confused Bible commentators for centuries. As his only child (Jud. 11:34), she was the lawful heir of his land and its accompanying legal status, but only so long as she did not marry outside his tribe (Num. 35:6–9).[33] By being adopted into the tribe of Levi, she could not thereafter marry outside of the tribe of Levi. Thus, she had to forfeit her inheritance from Jephthah. She could not extend her father's dynasty, a point Jordan made.[34] A father alienated his family's inheritance forever from his heirs if his male children were under age 20 or his daughters were unmarried at the time he made his vow. This did not mean that they lost their legal status as freemen; Levites possessed freeman status. But the heirs did lose their claim on the family's land.

Could the priest annul the vow? Yes. There was no compulsion that he adopt someone into his family. The vow was analogous to the vow of a daughter or married woman: it could be annulled within 24 hours by the male head of the household (Num. 30:3–8). The priests, acting in God's name, as the heads of God's ecclesiastical household, could lawfully annul someone's vow of adoption into the tribe. But if the vow was accepted by a priest in authority, the vow-taker and any other members of his family covered by his vow were then adopted into the tribe of Levi if they could pay the entry fee. Once adopted by the priest's family, there was no way back into non-Levitical freemanship in Israel. At the time of the adoption, the adopted family's original inheritance had been forfeited to the kinsman-redeemer, the closest relative in their original tribe (Num. 27:9–11).[35] They could retain their status as freemen only as members of the tribe of Levi. Their family land was no longer part of their inheritance. But the males were still members of God's holy army. They were still citizens.

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32. There were two exceptions: (1) when a family dedicated a piece of land to the priesthood and then refused to redeem it before the next jubilee year; (2) when a family dedicated a piece of land to the priesthood but then leased the whole property to someone else (Lev. 27:16–21); North, *Boundaries and Dominion*, ch. 36.

33. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 22.

34. Jordan, *Judges*, p. 205.

35. North, *Sanctions and Dominion*, ch. 15.

F. The Kinsman-Redeemer

Leviticus 27:2–8 is the passage governing the conditions of adoption into the tribe of Levi. There had to be a payment—the equivalent of a dowry—to the temple.[36] In the case of a slave, his owner had to provide the funds. If the adoptee was the head of a household, he had to make the payment on his own behalf, or else find someone to make it for him.

Who was the most likely person to make the payment for him if he could not afford to pay? Both judicially and economically, there is little doubt: the kinsman-redeemer. He would inherit title to the land left behind by a newly adopted family. The entry price was high; no one else was likely to have the same incentive to make so large a payment. This points to the work of Christ as the Kinsman-Redeemer of Israel and mankind. He has paid the fee for all those who are adopted into the New Covenant priesthood. No one else has either the incentive or the ability to pay this price. In His case, the incentive is not economic, for two reasons. First, Jesus Christ already is God the Father's lawful heir in history and eternity. He will inherit everything. Second, the entry price is too high—far beyond the very high price of 50 shekels in Old Covenant Israel. The price is the death of the Kinsman-Redeemer. His motivation was grace, not profit. Christians inherit as heirs of their Kinsmen-Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Everyone else is eternally disinherited.

Verse 8 reads: "But if he be poorer than thy estimation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall value him; according to his ability that vowed shall the priest value him." The high priest, Jesus Christ, has paid the maximum price for each of His saints—those set apart by God judicially for priestly service. Entering with nothing of our own, we do not need to plead before a priest for a lower entry fee. The high priest has paid it all.

G. Annulled

If this analysis is correct, then it should be obvious that this law has been annulled with the New Covenant's change in the priesthood.

36. I do not think the price was paid to Levite families. Had the money gone to individual families, there would have been a strong motivation for Levites to recruit new members of the tribe. The entry fee was to serve as a barrier to entry, not a motivation to recruit new members. If the money went directly to the temple, local Levites would have had far less incentive to recruit non-Levites into the tribe. Aaronic priests would have possessed a veto over adoption: the men with the greatest authority in Israel. Adoption in this case was tribal, not familial, analogous to circumcised resident aliens who were adopted into tribal cities if they were accepted to serve in God's holy army.

The passage's variations in price—young vs. old, male vs. female—have nothing to do with economic productivity. They are irrelevant for the economic analysis of labor markets. They were equally irrelevant for such analytical purposes under the Mosaic Covenant.

The prices listed in Leviticus 27:2–8 were not redemption prices; they were *entry barrier prices*. They were not based on the expected economic productivity of people who were then immediately redeemed out of God's ecclesiastical service; they were based on the need to screen power-seekers and security-seekers from access to ecclesiastical service. *They were not market prices; they were judicial prices*. They were not barriers to escape from ecclesiastical service; they were barriers to entry into ecclesiastical service. Thus, rather than applying economic analysis to the productivity of the groups specified in Leviticus 27:2–8, we should apply economic analysis to the question of the judicial boundary separating the tribe of Levi from the other tribes.

Conclusion

This passage is not about human sacrifice. It is about adoption: Jephthah's daughter became a Levite. It is about a transfer of inheritance: from Jephthah's daughter to his nearest of kin, his kinsman-redeemer. It is about the disinheritance of his family line in Israel.

The story of Jephthah's daughter is the story of *disinheritance through adoption* into the tribe of the Levites. The Levites could not legally own rural land in Israel. By offering her as a burnt offering—irrevocable adoption by the Levites—Jephthah disinherited her.

CONCLUSION TO JUDGES

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

JUDGES 21:25

God wanted a politically decentralized society. This is why He set up tribes. They controlled the land in their region. The local families could not lawfully be displaced from rural land for more than 49 years. This was the law of the jubilee year (Lev. 25).[1] It rested on the genocide of the conquest: the post-conquest distribution of rural land.

This was the way of God. God told Samuel to warn the Israelites about calling for a king. The king would oppress them (I Sam. 8:14–17).[2] The Israelites did not pay attention to Samuel's warning.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 24.

2. Chapter 14.

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

RUTH 2:11–12

The Book of Ruth presents the story of redemption. A Moabite woman was redeemed through covenantal adoption into a family of marginal covenant-keepers at best. Her mother-in-law was redeemed by the example of her daughter-in-law. An older man was elevated from obscurity to permanent fame by means of an act of grace that normally would have left him in obscurity.

It is a book about the importance of the family covenant in Mosaic Israel—an importance that exceeded both wealth and biological heirship. It is a book about an obscure Mosaic law that twice was central to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. It is a book about grace and self-sacrifice for the sake of the dead. It is a book about loyalty.

The Book of Ruth should remind us that it is better to make our decisions in terms of God's covenant than in terms of wealth. It is best to place our wealth at the service of the kingdom of God. We should place our poverty there, too.

8

LOST HOPE

> *Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years.*
>
> RUTH 1:1–4

The theocentric principle here is God's covenant, which includes inheritance.[1]

This family left Israel to journey to Moab. Moab was a covenantally perverse nation. It had its origin in the sin of incest. Moab was the son of the scheming firstborn daughter of Lot and her drunken father (Gen. 19:37). The daughters of Lot had lost hope in God's inheritance. They committed a grievous sin to gain inheritance on their terms.

Moabites had long been hostile to the Israelites. They had opposed the Israelites during the wilderness period (Num. 22–25). This led to a curse on them.

> An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam;

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012).

> but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee. Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever (Deut. 23:3–6).

To go to Moab for deliverance meant trusting in the gods of Moab. God told the Israelites not to seek the Moabites' peace and prosperity. Yet here was a family leaving Israel for residence in Moab in search of prosperity. This family had no faith in God.

The father died. The sons stayed for 10 years. They married Moabite women. Then they both died intestate. They never thought to return home. They looked to their future in Moab as the way to prosperity. Their inheritance would be in Moab. They were wrong.

When the sons died, their widowed mother decided to return home, but only because of good economic news from back home. "Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread" (Ruth 1:6). It was not God's covenant that lured her back; it was bread.

Her daughters-in-law went with her. She allowed this for part of the journey. Then she changed her mind.

> And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people (Ruth 1:8–10).

She expected them to remarry. She did not comprehend that *they had subordinated themselves covenantally to the God of Israel through their marriages*. She regarded their covenants with God as broken with the death of her sons. One daughter protested, but then took her advice. The other, Ruth, refused to be sent back into the land of Moab's gods. "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:16–17). Ruth understood the marriage covenant. She had been adopted by marriage into the household of a covenant-keeper. Her sister- in-law did not understand this. Her sister-in-law was as theologically ignorant as her mother-in-law was.

Naomi was a bitter woman. She saw the covenant only in terms of negative sanctions and biological inheritance.

> So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? (Ruth 1:19–21)

She had no faith in the future because she was too old to have children. She had told the two women, "Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband" (Ruth 1:12a). She failed to understand the central fact of the covenant after the Fall of man: *redemption by adoption*. Ruth had been redeemed by adoption—by God's special grace and by her marriage vow. Her sister-in-law had not been redeemed, and so failed to honor the adoption. We are not told how Ruth learned this—surely not from her husband or mother-in-law.

Conclusion

The Book of Ruth is the great book in the Bible on redemption by adoption. A Moabite woman understood the doctrine. A family of Israelites did not. The contrast could not have been sharper.

Ruth and Boaz were the means by which Naomi was restored to faith. This restoration was grounded in a strange Mosaic law: the law we call the Levirate marriage. The word comes from "levir," the Latin word for brother-in-law.

9

GLEANING

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

RUTH 2:1–2

Naomi and her sons did not return to Israel for a decade after the death of Elimilech (Ruth 1:4). Sometime between Naomi's departure from Israel and her return, Boaz became wealthy as a farmer. Elimilech's family remained outside of Bethlehem, yet they could have returned. The famine had subsided. They chose instead to remain in Moab. This showed a remarkable lack of faith in God.

A. The Gleaning Law

Ruth proposed that she go into the fields to serve as a gleaner. Naomi did not suggest this. This indicates the Ruth understood the implications of the law of gleaning better than Naomi did.

> And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God (Lev. 19:9–10).[1]

> When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 11.

> thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing (Deut. 24:19–22).[2]

The gleaning law was designed to protect the poor in rural locations. They had a moral claim on the leftovers of the land. The owners were not to strip a field bare of grain, or to strip the olive crop. The leftovers that fell to the ground would feed the very poor.

This system relied on the fact that gleaning produced a low return on invested time. A person so poor as to be reduced to gleaning had no higher output line of work available. Stooping in a field to pick up grain that the harvesters had missed was a low-productivity endeavor. Anyone who was dependent on food collected in this way had no better opportunity. This was a welfare program for the exceptionally poor.

The cost to the land owner was minimal. The extra time and work required to harvest fallen grain would not earn a high return. A man rich enough to hire harvesters was not poor. The economic return on the initial sweep across the fields was high. A second sweep would have been a low-return assignment. It was a better use of the harvesters' time to go on to the next section of the field, where the average return per investment of time and capital was high. The average return on the land itself was less. But the loss was minimal because of the low return on work expended. A harvester working on commission would not have wanted to spend time going through a field a second time. The gleaning law was advantageous to him. The owner would not assign the slim pickings to harvesters.

B. Ruth's Subordination

Ruth was in the right place at the right time. "And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap[penstance] was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech" (Ruth 2:3). Boaz showed up when she was in the field (v. 4). "Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this?" (v. 5). The servant said

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 62.

that she was a woman of Moab who had returned with Naomi (v. 6). She then asked permission of Boaz to glean in his field (v. 7). This indicates that the owner of the crop had the right to include some and exclude others. Boaz told her to glean only in his fields (v. 8). He also provided a social covering for her. “Have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee?” (v. 9b).

> Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore (Ruth 2:10–11).

Boaz understood that Ruth had covenanted with the God of Israel by returning to Israel when she was not required to. Her commitment to Naomi indicated that she had made a definitive break from the gods of Moab. He understood that Ruth was covenanted to God through Naomi. She had subordinated herself to God by subordinating herself to Naomi. Boaz made this clear to her. “The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth 2:12). He saw her as under the covenant and therefore a lawful recipient of God’s positive sanctions. She was grateful. “Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens” (v. 13). Boaz then went above and beyond the call of duty.

> And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not (Ruth 2:14–15).

He had begun the process of dealing with her as a kinsman-redeemer deals with a poor relative. He dealt with her as the widow of a near kinsman. He would have done the same for Naomi, but Naomi had not subordinated herself as a gleaner.

Ruth had not known that Boaz was a near kinsman. That became clear only when she took the grain back to Naomi.

> And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen (vv. 19–20).

Naomi told her to stay in Boaz's fields (v. 21). Ruth took her advice (v. 21).

Conclusion

Gleaning was a good way for land owners to provide protection to very poor people in the local community. It was hard work. It was low productivity work. Anyone choosing to be a gleaner had no better opportunities. Gleaning would have been no one's first choice of occupations.

One of the advantages of gleaning was that a hard-working person would have been seen by harvesters and perhaps even the land owner. Owners are always on the lookout for efficient, honest employees. Gleaning provided the close contact required by an owner to identify exceptionally good workers. Boaz spotted Ruth from the beginning.

10

THE MATCHMAKER

Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

RUTH 3:1–4

A. The Family Name

The theocentric principle here was the preservation of the family's God-designated name. Under the Mosaic law, a man who died without a child would lose his name in Israel. His land would be inherited by his next of kin, who was also known as the kinsman-redeemer and the blood-avenger. The Mosaic law had a way to overcome this form of disinheritance.

> If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel. And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother. Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it,

> and say, I like not to take her; Then shall his brother's wife come unto him in the presence of the elders, and loose his shoe from off his foot, and spit in his face, and shall answer and say, So shall it be done unto that man that will not build up his brother's house. And his name shall be called in Israel, The house of him that hath his shoe loosed (Deut. 25:5–10).[1]

Naomi recognized that Boaz was a near kinsman of her dead son, Mahlon, who had died intestate. Ruth was the widow. Had Mahlon lived in close proximity to his brother in Israel, each would have been responsible to fulfill this requirement. But they did not live in Israel. They both died intestate. This excused the nearest male relative from having a child with Ruth. She lived in Moab.

Upon her return, this changed. The land that had belonged to Elimilech would go to the nearest male relative at Naomi's death. There were no grandsons to inherit. The land would not go to Orpah, who had returned to Moab. It would not go to Ruth, a Moabite woman who was not part of the covenant line. Only through marriage to the nearest of kin could Elimilech's name be preserved in Israel. Otherwise, his land and name would automatically become the possession of the kinsman-redeemer at her death. That would be his inheritance.

Naomi was at long last beginning to think covenantally. Had she decided in Moab to pursue this plan of action, she would not have tried to send back her sons' wives. Either of them could have secured her husband's name by marrying Elimilech's nearest of kin.

B. Naomi's Plan

Naomi saw a way out of this situation. If Boaz would marry Ruth, the name of Elimilech might be preserved in Israel. So might the name of Mahlon. Both men had died outside the land, but through the family's land, the family's name could still be preserved. This was only possible if the nearest of kin decided to marry Ruth. As it turned out, Boaz was not the nearest of kin. Naomi must have known this. She also must have known that the nearest of kin would have no incentive to marry Ruth. This was not required of him. Mahlon was not his brother, nor had they lived in close proximity. But if Boaz could be persuaded to marry her, assuming the kinsman-redeemer refused, Boaz could serve as the kinsman-redeemer.

Naomi's plan was straightforward. Ruth should go to Boaz after

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 64.

he had drunk enough wine to make him interested in a good-looking woman. Naomi understood a fundamental rule of marriage. "You marry the person who is most available when you are most vulnerable." Ruth would make herself available.

Because this was Naomi's idea, Ruth would be regarded at worst as an accomplice of a scheming woman. But, because of the law of the brothers, Naomi would not be regarded as a woman who was after Boaz's property. On the contrary, she was after her late husband's property. If Boaz married Ruth and had a child with her, this child would become Elimilech's heir, not Boaz's heir. Elimilech's name, not Boaz's name, would be preserved. Boaz's name would be preserved through Ruth's second and subsequent children. This would have nothing to do judicially with Naomi.

This form of marriage was by adoption. The wife was adopted into her husband's family. Ruth had been adopted by Mahlon. She was therefore in the family of Elimilech. But, without a child, her late husband's name would not be attached to land in Israel.

Ruth followed Naomi's plan.

> And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:6–11).

This exchange reveals an important fact: Boaz was an older man. Ruth could have married a younger man. She must have been good looking. She choose him. This was not because of his physical appeal. It might have been for a more comfortable life, but she could have found some man to support her.

Why did this make her virtuous? Because she was acting on behalf of her late husband. She was honoring his name. She was subordinating her sexual interest for the sake of her late husband's name in Israel. This was an act of sacrifice on behalf of a dead man. This was a covenantally sacrificial decision.

C. The Marriage Law

We know that Boaz fully understood the implications of Ruth's offer of marriage. She did not make her proposal on her own authority, but on Naomi's. Naomi was acting to secure her husband's name through Ruth.

Boaz knew he was not Mahlon's kinsman-redeemer. There was a closer relative. He told her:

> And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning (Ruth 3:12–13).

He understood that she was not after him and his money but rather her husband's memory in Israel. He knew that she was willing to allow the other man to father her child. He did not ask her if she would do this. He knew that she would do this. That was what the Mosaic law required to secure Elimilech's inheritance.

He gave her grain to take home as a token of his commitment (v. 15). She took it to Naomi, who knew by this offering that Boaz was ready to take action. "Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day" (v. 18).

Conclusion

The story of the midnight encounter is not a story of seduction. It is a story of inheritance. Ruth acted on behalf of her father-in-law's name and her husband's name. This was a covenantal motivation. There were other men available, but they could not secure her husband's name. She presented herself to Boaz on behalf of her dead husband. Boaz was sufficiently impressed to take the next step: to secure that inheritance for her husband. He was willing to risk doing without her in order to fulfill the terms of the Mosaic law. He knew he would lose her if the kinsman-redeemer accepted the obligation.

11

THE NAMESAKE'S INHERITANCE

And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.

RUTH 4:3–4

The theocentric principle here was inheritance: point five of the biblical covenant.[1] Who would inherit the land? That would depend on the degree of covenantal commitment.

A. An Offer of Land

Boaz told the kinsman-redeemer the truth, but not the whole truth. He presented the proposition in terms of land. The land would eventually go to the kinsman-redeemer by lawful inheritance. Naomi was childless. No heir of Elimilech would inherit.

Boaz acted on behalf of Elimilech, but in the name of Naomi. He said that she wanted to sell land that was part of the inheritance. The kinsman-redeemer could get possession of this land by buying it from her while she was still alive. If he refused, Boaz would buy it. This would not secure the land for himself permanently. He could use it until the jubilee year. Then the land would revert to Naomi. If she had died, it would have gone to the kinsman-redeemer. This assumes

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1988] 2010), ch. 5.

that the courts enforced the jubilee year. There is no evidence that this was ever done in pre-exilic Israel. If it was not enforced, then the kinsman-redeemer would still inherit it at her death. Boaz was making an offer to buy the use of the land until it legally was transferred to the kinsman-redeemer.

The kinsman-redeemer decided to buy it. He wanted the use of it. He would become its owner before Naomi died.

At this point, Boaz provided additional information.

> Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it (Ruth 4:5–6).

1. A Different Inheritance

The obligation to perform the levirate[2] marriage changed the economics of the arrangement. The kinsman-redeemer would not inherit the land. His child would. The child would legally be the child of Mahlon. Mahlon's name would persevere. The land would not become the kinsman-redeemer's. It would become his biological child's, who would not be his judicial child. Whatever money he paid Naomi for the land would become her possession. The land would become his biological child's possession, but Mahlon's name would attach to it. So committed to inheritance and name was the kinsman-redeemer that he turned down the offer. He could have had the use of the land until the jubilee year, or at least until he died. But name was more important than economics—for the kinsman-redeemer, for Naomi, for Ruth, and for Boaz.

> Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe. And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day (Ruth 4:7–10).

2. "Levir": Latin for brother-in-law.

Consider the reason offered by the kinsman for not marrying Ruth. It had to do with his own inheritance. "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it." He had hoped to inherit the land of his heirless deceased brother.[3] His sister-in-law was too old to bear children. He was therefore willing to buy it from Naomi before she died. This would have given her money to live on. The land would have come to him eventually. But Boaz was proposing something else. If Boaz married Ruth, and if Ruth gave birth, then Elimelech's land would pass to the child of Ruth, who would become the family's firstborn son. This land would be part of the legacy of Ruth's dead husband.

Because of Boaz's willingness to become Ruth's husband, the closer kinsman could gain control over Naomi's land only by marrying Ruth. But if she bore him an heir, he could not pass this land to any other children by an existing marriage. The land would pass to Ruth's firstborn child. Assuming that he was single, and assuming that he married Ruth, the land owned by Elimelech could not become his namesake's land; it would become Elimelech's namesake's land: Ruth's firstborn child. His own flesh and blood would inherit this land, but *this biological heir would not be his judicial namesake*. So powerful was the concept of family name in Israel that the man turned down an opportunity to purchase land that his biological heir would eventually inherit.

2. Marriage

For the existing kinsman to lose the inheritance from Elimelech through Naomi, another kinsman had to marry Ruth. Ruth could never possess an inheritance in Israel to leave to her firstborn except through the decision of a kinsman of her late husband to adopt her as a wife. Without Ruth's marriage to a kinsman of Elimelech, the land would automatically pass at Naomi's death to Elimelech's nearest of kin, i.e., Elimelech's kinsman-redeemer.

The existing kinsman-redeemer had to approve of this transfer, which was why Boaz assembled elders as witnesses. The existing kinsman-redeemer could retain his claim on the inheritance only by marrying Ruth and then having Ruth remain barren, as she had been in Moab. If she bore a child who lived long enough to bear children to inherit, the existing kinsman-redeemer and his heirs could not inherit this land. He decided that this marriage was not worth the added

3. The brother had fathered two sons, but both had died without children.

economic risk. If he married Ruth, and she bore him a child, all of the capital that he would invest into the land would become part of another man's covenant line. It would be his biological child's family line, but not his family name's line. This is evidence that blood lines in Israel were regarded as less important than covenant lines. *Family name was more important in Israel than biological generation*.

B. Name Above Biology

This is an extremely important theological point. Rahab the former harlot and Ruth the Moabite were adopted into their husbands' covenant lines. This adoption was by oath: a marriage oath. Through them came David the king and Jesus, who was a greater king than David. Through two foreign women, the covenant line was extended. More to the point, through these women the supreme covenant line in Israel was extended: Judah's. Most to the point, through them the promised Seed was born (Matt. 1:5, 16). The crucial covenant line was preserved through marriage, and, in Ruth's case, levirate marriage to the biological heir of Rahab: Boaz (Matt. 1:5).

1. The New Kinsman-Redeemer

Boaz became the kinsman-redeemer of Elimelech's line. He did this by marrying Ruth, a former gentile. Only through his marriage to Ruth could he serve as the kinsman-redeemer of Elimelech's line. That is, Boaz, as an heir in the line of Judah and, as it turned out, progenitor of Jesus the redeemer, exercised this office by marrying a Moabite. Moabite males took 10 generations to become citizens (Deut. 23:3). As heirs of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his firstborn daughter (Gen. 19:37), Moabites were regarded as far more perverse covenantally than Egyptians, who could become citizens in three generations (Deut. 23:7–8). But because of Boaz's judicial role as kinsman-redeemer through marriage, Ruth was adopted into the covenant line in just one generation. *Of all legal relationships biblically, adoption is the most authoritative*. Through adoption, the disinherited children of Adam re-enter the family of God. *Adoption is the judicial basis of inheritance*. Adoption is by *covenant oath*, not biology.

Ruth, a former gentile, was adopted into Israel's supreme covenant line by the willingness of a man to become a kinsman-redeemer to her late husband. "Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from

among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day" (Ruth 4:10). By lowering himself socially by marrying a former Moabite, and by being willing to raise up seed for his kinsman Elimelech by way of Elimelech's dead son, Boaz was granted an extraordinary blessing. He became the biological forefather of David and Jesus. Legally, these heirs were not part of his personal covenant line. Only through Elimelech's name could he participate in the crucial covenant line. Only by being willing to raise up seed on behalf of another did he unknowingly place himself as the key figure in the extension of the key covenant line in Israel and, for that matter, in all of history. Boaz became the biggest covenantal somebody in his generation only because he was willing to become a covenantal nobody in the extension of Elimelech's line. The land that he presumably bought from Naomi became the family inheritance in another man's line. Any improvements that he made in this land became another family line's property. By abandoning his own name covenantally, he thereby became the greatest name of his generation, a name that is listed in both of the messianic genealogies in the New Testament (Matt. 1:5; Luke 3:32).

2. The Imputation of a Man's Name

This case law was a seed law. As a law governing inheritance, it was also a land law. The firstborn of a levirate marital union inherited the deceased father's name. The inheritance was above all covenantal: part of God's promise to Abraham. The deceased man's name was imputed to the heir by God and by law, even though he was born of the levir. *The imputation of a man's name was the essence of his inheritance*: from his fathers and to his children. God had revealed this to Abraham: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2–3).

What the levirate law tells us is that the imputation of a man's name was more fundamental than either genetic inheritance or family discipline. In the context of the continuing academic debate between "nature" (genetics) and "nurture" (social environment), neither was fundamental in Israel. What was fundamental was *judicial imputation*. The levir performed a redemptive act on behalf of his brother's covenant line. This act was far more judicial than biological or social. He provided biological seed and family discipline, but the decisive fac-

tor was judicial-covenantal-eschatological, not biological or social. It was so decisive that the law prohibiting a brother from marrying his sister-in-law was suspended. That law had specifically stated that the negative sanction would be childlessness (Lev. 20:21). The levirate marriage was mandated by God specifically for producing an heir.

Because of Boaz's grace to Naomi through Ruth, a unique and judicially unconventional thing took place: Boaz replaced Elimelech in Israelite history as part of the covenant line of David (I Chron. 2:11–12). In terms of the law of the levir, the family line through Ruth was Elimelech's, but Elimelech is never mentioned in relation to David. It was Boaz's marriage to Ruth in the name of Elimelech that secured Boaz's place in history. As the heir of Rahab, his act of mercy grafted Rahab into the kingly line retroactively. Judicially, Boaz's family line was irrelevant to the coming of David. Yet because of his grace shown to a former gentile woman, his family name entered the most important family line in man's history. Boaz established his name and his family line's name in history by a merciful covenantal act which, in terms of the Mosaic law, submerged his name to Elimelech's. Boaz, who had not even been the closest of kin to Elimelech's son, and who had in no way been required to serve as levir, replaced Elimelech in Israel's family lists.

Jesus would imitate Boaz's judicial precedent, not by marrying, but by refusing to marry. By refusing to marry, He thereby transferred His inheritance to His kinsmen. He died on their behalf, so that they could be legally adopted into His covenant line.[4] His death and resurrection have offered to the gentiles God's covenantal inheritance by means of adoption, just as Boaz's willingness to marry Ruth offered her covenantal inheritance through adoption. As the heir of Jacob's promise (Gen. 49:10), Jesus was the true heir in Israel, the son of David the king. But Jesus was not Joseph's biological heir. Here we see another act of mercy: Joseph's refusal to put Mary away for fornication with another man. Joseph adopted Jesus as his firstborn son, and in doing so, gained shame for himself: the birth of his firstborn son in fewer than nine months after marriage.

We do not know if Boaz had biological heirs through a former marriage. If he did, his property went to them. If he did not, then his

4. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:3–5).

second-born and later children inherited. Ruth was their mother, but they bore his name. In this case, Ruth became the agent for extending his name in history. The Bible is silent about this covenant line.

C. The Mosaic Family as a Tribal Unit

The seed laws and land laws existed because of Jacob's granting of blessings in Genesis 49, and specifically, his prophecy regarding the coming ruler, Shiloh.[5] They were tribal laws, not laws governing the family unit as such. Had they been laws governing the family unit as such, they would have been cross-boundary laws, universal in scope then and now. The law of the levirate marriage would still be in force. This law is no longer in force because Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Covenantal adoption has completely replaced the law of the levirate marriage in the New Covenant. Jesus established the model. His death, which ensured His lack of biological heirs, was inherent in His plan of adoption and the transfer of kingdom inheritance. *Confession of faith has replaced tribal name as the basis of biblical inheritance*. Confession of faith involves adopting a new family name. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11:26b). A man's legal claim to a portion of God's kingdom inheritance is based on his possession of Christ's name through adoption. The New Covenant's preservation of Christ's name through *adoption by conversion* has replaced the Old Covenant's preservation of family name through *adoption by reproduction*.[6] What has changed, above all, is the tribal basis of inheritance. Covenantally mandated tribes no longer exist. This is why the seed laws and land laws have been replaced by the laws governing confession of faith and church membership. The church is the new nation that has inherited God's kingdom (Matt. 21:43). It has no tribes.

D. The Story of Tamar

The witnesses understood what was at stake judicially. "And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman" (Ruth 4:12).

5. The practice of levirate marriage existed earlier than Genesis 49. Onan's rebellion indicates that the practice did exist, and it was a law, for God's negative sanction came on him. Without law, there is no legitimate sanction. This was not, however, a written law. Its application was tied to the tribal units of Jacob's family. Lot's daughters had used a perverse application of the levirate marriage. They had deceived their father when he was drunk.

6. The mark of adoption in the Old Covenant was circumcision.

Tamar had been cheated of her inheritance as a mother through the son of Judah, Onan. Her first husband had died, and Onan his brother refused to obey the law of the levir. This law was in force before Moses. Onan may have thought he would inherit his late brother's land. His younger brother was too young to marry Tamar. There would be no child within the family for Tamar. Onan's calculation backfired immediately.

> And the thing which he did displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also. Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house (Gen. 38:10–11).

Tamar waited. Shelah grew up. But Judah did not give him to be her husband. Then Judah's wife died. So, Tamar decided to achieve her goal by deception. She disguised herself as a prostitute and went to a city where she knew Judah was visiting. He went in to her. He gave her collateral until he would send her a lamb as payment. They both returned home separately. When she was found to be pregnant three months later, he was ready to have her executed. On what basis? Tradition? It was not a capital crime to be a prostitute under the Mosaic law, except for the daughter of a priest (Lev. 21:9). It was a capital crime for both parties when a man to committed adultery with a married woman (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Judah was a widower. Tamar was not married. So, she had not committed adultery with him.

Judah had cheated her out of motherhood, and he had cheated his first son out of his name in Israel. He did not compel Shelah to marry her. Tamar decided to get what belonged to her and her late husband from the closest kinsman who was available. In response to Judah's verbal judgment against her, Tamar presented the collateral goods that he had given to her. "And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more" (Gen. 38:26). Israelites honored her for her successful deception. She had preserved her husband's name. Her firstborn son was Pharez.

E. The Covenant Line

Boaz gained the right to marry Ruth as the nearest of kin. "So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son" (Ruth 4:13). Ruth

fully understood the judicial implications of this birth. "And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel" (v. 14). Little did she know. Her son was Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David. This was to become the supreme family line in Israel. Out of David's line came Jesus.

> And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse (Matt. 1:5).

> Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson (Luke 3:32).

Yet, covenantally speaking, Obed was the son of Mahlon. Boaz and Ruth are the most unlikely names in the genealogies. Ruth was from Moab, the enemy of Israel. Boaz was not the covenantal father of Obed. Yet the story of Boaz and Ruth appears as a book on the Bible. Why? Because of her faithfulness in returning to Israel as Naomi's servant. This testified to her covenantal commitment to God. Similarly, the willingness of Boaz to subordinate his name to Mahlon's in Elimilech's covenant line testified to his willingness to sacrifice for his brother's name. He was not legally required to do this, because Mahlon had lived in Moab, not nearby. Ethics is central to God's covenants. These two were models of ethical righteousness.

F. Ten Generations to Freedom

The time restrictions placed on Hebrew servitude did not apply to non-Hebrew servants. They were the true slaves in Israel. Why were foreigners placed into slavery, generation after generation (Lev. 25:44–46)?[7] The theological answer is clear: they were covenanted slaves to foreign gods. Their release from this covenantal bondage took 10 generations of faithful service to a family or institution under God's covenant.

The foreigner or foreign nation that rejected God's older covenant faced judgment in history. One of these judgments in the Old Testament was to become a slave in Israel. "Thus saith the Lord, The labour of Egypt, and merchandise of Ethiopia and of the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over unto thee, and they shall be thine: they shall come after thee; in chains they shall come over, and they

7. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 30.

shall fall down unto thee, they shall make supplication unto thee, saying, Surely God is in thee; and there is none else, there is no God" ["no other God": New King James Version] (Isa. 45:14). This was to be Israel's blessing and the foreigner's curse.

Yet with every curse in history there is a measure of blessing. Biblical servitude in the Old Testament was always intended to lead men to ethical reformation and spiritual freedom. What about heathen slaves? Weren't they slaves "forever"? Leviticus 25:46 says, "they shall be your bondmen forever." Then in what way was heathen slavery a means of redemption in Israel? We know that in one crucial case, the word "forever" meant 10 generations. Deuteronomy 23:3 specifies that it was to take 10 generations for sojourners from Ammon and Moab, the "bastard" nations that were the sons of Lot's incestuous relationships with his daughters (Gen. 19:30–38), to enter the congregation, thereby becoming full citizens in Israel. But Nehemiah 13:1 reads: "On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of the Lord for ever." The Hebrews understood "forever" to mean 10 consecutive generations of covenant membership (circumcision).

Why 10 generations? This was the judicial curse imposed on bastards. There was also a 10-generation prohibition against a bastard's heirs' entering into the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2). Judah and Tamar produced a bastard son, Pharez. David was symbolically the tenth-generation son of this illicit union (Ruth 4:18–20). He then became the mightiest king in Israel's history. He "entered the congregation" as the supreme civil judge. As Rushdoony wrote, "There is no reason to doubt that eunuchs, bastards, Ammonites, and Moabites regularly became believers and were faithful worshippers of God. *Congregation* has reference to the whole nation in its governmental function as God's covenant people."[8] Those who were the circumcised heirs of bastards had to wait patiently until their own heirs could regain legal access to the civil office of judge. Rushdoony continued: "The purpose of the commandment is here the protection of authority. Authority among God's people is *holy;* it does require a separateness. It does not belong to every man simply on the ground of his humanity."[9]

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8. R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 65.

9. *Idem*.

What about heathen slaves? Would they ever regain freedom? Yes: if they remained in the household for 10 generations, they became full congregation members. At that point, they came under the laws that regulated Hebrew bondservants. At age 20, a Hebrew male became a legal adult, subject to military numbering (Ex. 30:14). It would have been illegal to keep such an adult, tenth-generation heathen slave in slavery after he reached age 20. Thus, it took 10 generations of "circumcised service" to God and to the Hebrew household to escape slavery. But escape was legally possible for one's distant heirs. Better to serve as a slave in a Hebrew household than to be at ease in paganism outside of Zion. Pagans, then as now, went to hell if they died outside the household of faith. They then become eternal slaves under God, the Eternal Slave-Master. Thus, *enslavement in ancient Israel was a means of potential liberation for the heathen*.

Then what about the Gibeonites? The author of the Book of Joshua (possibly it was the prophet Samuel) says that they remained slaves, "even unto this day." The Gibeonites were still in bondage at least four centuries after they became slaves in the tabernacle, for Saul slew many of them, despite the fact they were under his covenantal protection as a separate people within the land (II Sam. 21:1–2). Four centuries seems to be longer than 10 generations, for the average lifespan of the Hebrews had shortened to 70 years by Moses' day (Ps. 90:10). This is comparable to today's lifespans, and one generation is classified as under 40 years—usually closer to 30 years.

G. The Incomplete Genealogy in Ruth 4

Could this 400-year time period of Gibeonite slavery have been less than 10 generations after Joshua's covenant with them, in fact, a mere five generations? I ask this seemingly preposterous biological question because David is listed as the tenth generation after Tamar and Judah (Ruth 4:18–22), yet only five generations after the era of Joshua. What are we to make of this evidence? Jephthah said that it had been 300 years from Joshua's conquest to his own day (Jud. 11:26). The only way to explain the genealogy of David—assuming that the genealogy of Ruth 4 is complete—is to assume that those born after Nahshon attained abnormally long lives, such as the 130 years of Jehoiada (II Chron. 24:15), and also to assume that they fathered the covenant-line sons remarkably late in life: close to age 100. These assumptions are highly improbable. It is therefore unlikely that this genealogy is complete. The listed line of Judah was Pharez, Hezron,

Ram, Amminadab, and Nahshon. Nahshon was a contemporary of Moses (Num. 1:7). Thus, only four generations are listed in between Nahshon and David: Salmon, who married Rahab (Matt. 1:5), Boaz (who married Ruth), Obed, Jesse, and then David.

The Bible provides additional internal evidence that the genealogy is incomplete. First, Abraham was considered unique in having fathered a son at age 100, yet he lived centuries before the normal human lifespan had shortened to age 70 (Ps. 90:10). There is no mention of three consecutive abnormally long lifespans in the period of the judges (conquest to kingship). This silence is important evidence, though not conclusive, which testifies against the completeness of the genealogy of Ruth 4.

Second, the lifespans of those in the tribe of Judah had been comparatively short: five generations, Pharez to Nahshon, compared to four for the tribe of Levi: Levi to Moses (Ex. 6:16–26). Are we to believe that, without warning, every subsequent male in this family line fathered a child around age 100, while everyone else's lifespans had shortened to 70 years? This seems unlikely. If there had been such a return to pre-conquest lifespans in this single family line, why doesn't the Bible give us some reason for it? Caleb's strength at age 85 was a miracle, as he understood (Josh. 14:9–11): God's special sustaining of a faithful man because of God's promise to him 40 years earlier (Num. 14:30).

Third, Salmon was *at most* 59 when Jericho fell. The exodus generation perished in the wilderness. This meant that at the time of the exodus, Salmon was not old enough to have been numbered as an adult. Since numbering of adult males took place at age 20 (Ex. 30:14), Salmon at most was 19 years old at the exodus. Add to this 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and we get age 59. He married Rahab, who as a prostitute was probably at least 20 years old, and perhaps 30, at the time of the fall of Jericho. Did she give birth to Boaz 40 years later (age 99 for Salmon)? How old was she if she did wait 40 years to bear Boaz? Sixty? Seventy? And if Salmon was under age 19 at the time of the exodus, and fathered Boaz around age 100, 50 or 60 years after the fall of Jericho, then Rahab would have been that much older. This seems extremely unlikely. It is therefore difficult to reject the conclusion that there were numerous unlisted generations in between Salmon and Boaz. It would be emotionally convenient to believe in the long lifespan view, Salmon to Jesse, and therefore to accept the genealogy of Ruth 4 at face value, but the

internal evidence from Scripture makes it difficult to accept. The highly specific revelation concerning the chronology of the judges (Jud. 11:26) is God's means of pointing to the literary nature of the post-Salmon genealogy. It would be difficult to argue that Jephthah erred by several centuries, when we are also told that there were 480 years between the exodus and the beginning of the construction of the temple (I Kings 6:1), which began around 1012 B.C.[10] Only by ignoring I Kings 6:1, and by dating the exodus centuries later than the early 1400s—which so many compromising Christian authors have done—could we shorten the period of the judges to such an extent that the lifespans of the final five generations of the Ruth 4 genealogy could be made to fit.

If the genealogy in Ruth 4 is incomplete, what explanation can we offer? I think it is because the author of Ruth wanted to emphasize the ethical basis of David's elevation to the throne: the liberating "tenth generation" after the covenantal mark of bastardy began. (This is additional indirect evidence for Samuel as the author of Ruth.) The shortened genealogy is a literary device pointing to a theological conclusion: *liberty and authority after 10 generations.* The genealogy's very incompleteness testifies to the importance of the tenth generation after the imposition of the covenantal curse. It points to the temporary nature of a curse in history that lasts "forever." It therefore points to God's grace to those who are patient in righteous living.

Conclusion

The law of the levir died with the death of the Old Covenant in A.D. 70. That law governed family name in a nation that was defined by family name: Israel. Jacob/Israel had pronounced this prophecy: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). The tribes had to be separated until Shiloh arrived. He arrived, and Israel crucified Him. Within one generation, Israel and the law of the levir ceased to exist.

In the era of Boaz and Ruth, the law of the levir was in force. Boaz was the nearest of kin who accepted his moral—but not legal—obligation to his deceased kinsman to preserve his kinsman's name. He promised to have children with Ruth. By this, as it turned out, his own name was preserved in Israel.

10. Chapter 17.

CONCLUSION TO RUTH

> *So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the* Lord *gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the* Lord*, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.*
>
> RUTH 4:13–16

Ruth testified to the power of a kinsman-redeemer to restore life. She was not speaking of Boaz. She was speaking of Obed. The son born in a levirate marriage was Naomi's hope for the future.

This may seem strange to Western Christians. This is because they do not understand the Old Covenant's concept of inheritance. Obed was part of the family line of Judah. Jacob had prophesied to his sons, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). This was a messianic prophecy. Jesus was born in the covenant line of Boaz and Ruth. He fulfilled Jacob's prophecy.

The law of the levirate marriage twice sustained this covenant line: first, with Judah and Tamar; second, with Boaz and Ruth.

Ruth was a woman of great loyalty: to her husband's name, to her mother-in-law, and to God. "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). She has come down through the ages as an example of loyalty. But Boaz was no less loyal: loyal to his kinsman's name in Israel. He served as the kinsman-redeemer. Jesus did the same.

It would be a mistake to see Ruth as a gold-digger who was after Boaz's money. It was Naomi, not Ruth, who initiated the plan to gain Boaz as Ruth's husband. What was her motive? From Ruth's testimonial to her, it appears that her motive was to gain an heir who would bear her husband's name. This was a legitimate goal under the Mosaic Covenant. Yet, in retrospect, Obed bore Boaz's name. Judicially, he was Mahlon's son, but in terms of the power of the story, he bore Boaz's name. Boaz's name appears in the genealogies of Jesus, not Elimilech's and not Mahlon's.

INTRODUCTION TO SAMUEL

And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.

I SAMUEL 3:20

Samuel was a prophet. Samuel also served as a judge of Israel. He was the last of the judges. He anointed both Saul and David to be kings.

The two books of Samuel tell the story of the transition from judgeship to kingship, from political decentralization to centralization. It was an era of growing disbelief in God and increasing belief in the state. When the people came to Samuel requesting a king, Samuel saw what this meant.

> But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a kin (I Sam. 8:6–10).

There is very little economic information in the two books. First Samuel tells of the decline of the priesthood under Eli's two sons (I Sam. 2:22–25) and the fall of the judgeship under Samuel's two sons (I Sam. 8:1–3).

It begins with the story of Samuel's miraculous birth. When his mother learned she was pregnant, she sang a song of great reversals in history. Winners lose, and losers win. Mary sang a similar song when

she learned that she was pregnant (Luke 1:46–55).[1] God raises up some, and He pulls down others. Her message was clear: God is in charge; men are not.

The priests of Philistia believed that God might possibly be in charge. They had suffered plagues because they had brought the Ark of the Covenant inside their borders. Inside the cities, the Ark was followed by plagues. They wanted to believe in chance, but they were forced to believe in God. Causation is in His hands.

Finally, there is the story of kingship. Samuel warned the people not to centralize power in this way. They would pay for this rebellion with higher taxes. The people paid no attention. People down through history have refused to listen to this warning.

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

12

THE GREAT REVERSAL

> *They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them.*
>
> I SAMUEL 2:5–8

The theocentric principle here is the absolute sovereignty of God in history.

A. The God of the Covenant

This is Hannah's song of rejoicing after she handed over her toddler son Samuel to Eli the priest. Samuel's birth had been an answer to her prayer, for she had been barren for many years. Shortly after his birth, she made a vow: "I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever" (I Sam. 1:22b). She fulfilled her vow when he was a toddler. "Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there" (I Sam. 1:28). God received a positive rate of return on that borrowed asset. In his office as judge, Samuel changed Israel forever.

Hannah viewed God as the source of blessings and cursings. In her song of praise, she spoke of both. She spoke of great reversals in history. Those on top fall. Those on the bottom rise. This is all due to God's absolute control over history. Hannah's song was clearly the

model for Mary's *magnificat* a millennium later (Luke 1:46–55).[1] This fundamental issue is inheritance: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." She had just given up her recent inheritance by giving her son to the church.

This view of God's control over history is based on the five-point biblical covenant. God is sovereign over history: point one.[2] "The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." He places men in the economic hierarchy. "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: He bringeth low, and lifteth up." Hierarchy is point two.[3] He brings sanctions: point four.[4] He secures the inheritance of the righteous: point five.[5] The only point that is not explicitly affirmed in her song is point three: law.[6] But, because the song praises God for reversing the positions of those up high and those down low, it implicitly assumes that the deciding issue is ethics. God does not randomly push people up or down on the hierarchies of life. Her son, a judge, would spend his career declaring God's law and announcing God's historical sanctions.

As the God of the covenant, God arranges the flow of history in terms of His plan. His plan conforms to the covenant and confirms it. Moses said: "But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (Deut. 8:18).[7] God is predictable. The affairs of the world are not random. They conform to His law and His decree.

There are times when good people are on the bottom. That had been her situation. Her husband's other wife had borne children. She lorded it over Hannah. "And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 1.

2. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 1. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, [1980] 2010), ch. 1.

3. *Ibid*., ch. 2. North, ch. 2.

4. *Ibid*., ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

5. *Ibid*., ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

6. *Ibid*., ch. 3. North, ch. 3.

7. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 22.

she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat" (I Sam. 1:6–7). Her husband attempted to comfort her. "Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (I Sam. 1:8). The answer was clearly "no, you are not." But Hannah held her peace. She prayed for years. Then Eli the priest told her that God would grant her request (v. 17). God did.

Hannah did not sing praises of a God who intervenes only to bring positive sanctions. She praised the God who brings negative sanctions. Making things right for the illegitimately downtrodden means bringing the trodders low.

B. Sacrifice for the Kingdom's Sake

Hannah was more interested in the kingdom of God than in her role as a mother. She saw her role as a mother as covenantal. She gave Samuel to God. In terms of the Mosaic law, she had to tell her husband. He had the right to veto it by the end of the day.

> And if she had at all an husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul; And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her in the day that he heard it: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard it; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the Lord shall forgive her (Num. 30:6–8).[8]

From what we learn of him here, Elkanah was a weak-willed man who was not in control of his household. He could not control one wife. He could not comfort the other. He went along with Hannah's vow. He surrendered his role as a father of Samuel. They had more children. "And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said, The Lord give thee seed of this woman for the loan which is lent to the Lord. And they went unto their own home. And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord" (I Sam. 2:20–21). We hear nothing of Elkanah again.

We do not know the names of her other children. They left no mark on Israel's historical record. The son she voluntarily surrendered into Eli's hands changed Israel and human history. He made

8. Gary North, *Sanctions and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Numbers*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1997] 2012), ch. 16.

David king, and through David came Jesus (Matt. 1:1).

Hannah surrendered Samuel through gratitude for the immediate past and faith in the long-term future. She believed that God would make better use of Samuel in the household of Eli than in her own household. What mattered most to her was what use God would make of him. She placed the kingdom first and herself second. She did not know what the positive sanctions would be for her. She did not know of five more children to come. But she knew of God's sanctions in history, which are not random. God had intervened on her behalf. She intervened on His behalf. She did not have to make her vow. She lawfully could have kept him at home. God could have raised him up to be a judge in her husband's household. But she did not know that he would become a judge. She saw only that he would be more likely to serve God well in the sanctuary of a priest's household than her husband's.

She visibly testified to the fact that she understood that parents are to serve as God's agents of instruction for their children. Their social function is covenantal. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). She provided a tutor for her son: Eli the priest. Instead of bringing the tutor into her household, she sent her son into his household. She did not cling to any notion that the best teacher is always a child's parents. Parents have a God-given responsibility to train their children, but this responsibility can lawfully be delegated to a specialist.

Conclusion

Hannah's song, like Mary's, speaks of great reversals. The poor get rich. The rich get poor. There is no security in history other than God and His covenant. God is completely in control. "The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up." Impersonal social forces are not sovereign. Impersonal biological forces are not sovereign. Neither nature nor nurture is sovereign. God, and God alone, is sovereign. This is the message of Hannah's song. It serves as a crucial foundation for Christian economics, Christian political science, Christian sociology, and Christian theology. Any attempt to substitute another concept of historical causation is a fist waved in the face of God. We find its refutation in Psalm 2, a psalm written by the man Samuel anointed as king.

13

THEORIES OF CAUSATION

Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: And take the ark of the LORD, *and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Beth-shemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us.*

I SAMUEL 6:7–9

The theocentric principle here is the covenantal structure of historical causation.

A. A Pattern of Negative Sanctions

The Philistines had a problem. They had defeated the Israelites. Their victory had come despite the presence of the Ark of the Covenant inside the Israelite army. As a token of their victory, they brought the captured Ark inside the boundaries of Philistia.

Every time the Ark was brought into a Philistine city, disasters followed. In Ashdod, the leaders put the Ark in the same temple in front of the image of the local deity, Dagon. This image was found the next day bowing before the Ark. The priests put it upright again. The next morning, it was found bowing to the Ark, with its hands and head broken off. Meanwhile, people in the city were struck with hemorrhoids (I Sam. 5:1–6). They drew the correct conclusion: "And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god" (v. 7). The leaders decided that Gath should have the honor of being the residence for the Ark. They sent the Ark to Gath.

The people of Gath were immediately struck with hemorrhoids (v. 9). "Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people" (v. 10). The Ekronites had figured out cause and effect here. "So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there" (v. 11).

We see here the speeding up of assessment and decision-making. In Ashdod, it took at least two days. In Gath, it took one day. The Ekronites knew what would happen even before the Ark entered the city. They all drew the same conclusion: the hand of God was on them, and the Ark was the reason. They all adopted the same policy: send the Ark somewhere else.

Ekron's leaders knew enough to recommend sending the Ark back to Israel. But the decision-makers hesitated. That would be an admission of defeat. It would mean that the military victory they had enjoyed was due to God, not to the strength of the gods of Philistia. The token of that military victory was the Ark itself.

Inside the boundaries of Philistia, the Ark was dangerous. Gentiles were not to approach it. Inside Israel, it was defended by three layers of defenders: the three clans of Levi. Merari defended the outer circle (Num. 4:32–33); Gershon defended the second circle (Num. 4:26–28); Kohath defended the inner circle (Num. 4:15).

Any violation of the Ark's sacred boundaries by an unauthorized person, meaning an unsanctified person, was an act of sacrilege: a profanation. By bringing the Ark inside the boundaries of Philistia, the Philistines committed sacrilege. They profaned the Ark. So, city by city, the scourges came. Still, the leaders refused to do what the leaders of Ekron knew should be done: send the Ark back inside the boundaries of Israel.

> And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place (I Sam. 6:1–2).

The priests still refused to face the problem squarely. So, they hedged their bets. On the one hand, they recommended a trespass

offering: five gold pieces fashioned in the shape of hemorrhoids, one for each city (I Sam. 6:17). That would publicly announce to God that they knew who was behind their specific affliction. Also to be included were golden mice (v. 18). On the other hand, they proposed a test. The test was the cart and the undomesticated cattle. Take the cart and the cattle to the edge of the nation. Let it loose. See where the cattle take it. Normally, the cattle would go home. If they went into Israel, the Philistines could then logically conclude that God had been behind all of their afflictions.

B. Profaning the Ark

Inside the cities, the locals knew who was behind their afflictions. This is why they sent the Ark to the next city. But, outside the cities, the afflictions ceased. They dared to keep the Ark for seven months inside the land. The afflictions ceased or subsided because the Ark was being profaned less specifically. Why? Because each city had its own god. *The closer the Ark was to the gods of a city, the more threatening the afflictions*. This was the same in Israel. The closer to the Ark a person approached, the greater his risk of divine intervention against him. If he was allowed to pass across the various defensive barriers, the greater the threat to those doing the guarding.

The sons of Eli had been the examples. They had profaned the Ark. A prophet had warned Eli, their father.

> Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them. And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever (I Sam. 2:31–35).

So outraged was God at the sinful performance of these sacrilegious men that God allowed the nation to be defeated on the field of battle.

> And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of

> the army in the field about four thousand men. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God (I Sam. 4:2–4).

God was after the two sons. The nation had allowed them to continue as oficiating priests. The nation was now paying for this refusal to defend the Ark. "And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain" (I Sam. 4:10–11).

Eli had known. He had warned them.

> Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the LORD's people to transgress (I Sam. 2:20–24).

His warning did no good. "Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them" (25b). To slay them, God also slew thousands of Israelites. This, not the gods of Philistia, was why the Philistines had defeated Israel's holy army. That army was not holy; it was profane. It had not defended the holiness of the Ark. It had violated it.

The Philistines became even more profane when they brought the Ark inside the nation's boundaries and cities. They were suffering the consequences.

C. A Rigged Test

The leaders obeyed their priests.

> And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home: And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the

> right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh (I Sam. 6:10–12).

The rulers of the cities had already figured this out. For seven months, the leaders refused to do what the Ekronites knew had to be done: send the Ark back to Israel. They procrastinated. Why?

The priests still wanted to leave a theological escape hatch. If the Ark could be kept in the land safely, its presence would publicly testify to the victory of the gods of Philistia. The defeat of Israel would not be seen by the Philistines as God's judgment on Israel, with Philistia serving as His agent of wrath. That would identify Philistia as a kind of backdrop to the history of God's covenant with Israel.

That was what Philistia was. The priests suspected this, which is why they designed the test. But they wanted a way out of this public admission of second-place temporary status in history. This way out would be determined by cattle.

Modern science uses the science of statistics to identify causation. In subatomic physics, probability replaces causation. For atomic physics and everything else, there is an endless epistemological battle between those who regard deviations from randomness as the test of causation vs. those who affirm logic as the source of causation. This goes back to the rival schools of pre-Socratic philosophy: Heraclitus (randomness) vs. Parmenides (logic). This debate has never been resolved.

The priests of Philistia adopted a version of randomness: a pair of milk cows. Their calves were separated from them. Normally, the cows would follow their calves. If the cows, who had never before been yoked, headed back across the border into Israel, then causation was not chance-based. It was ordered.

The test was rigged. There was no chance involved. The cows would normally follow their calves. Unless their calves wandered into Israel, the cows would not wander into Israel. The test was rigged in favor of the gods of Philistia. The priests did not let the calves make the decision. Who knows? One might have stayed in Philistia, while the other went into Israel. That would be chance. Instead of flipping a coin—coins had not yet been invented—the priests could have let the calves decide the issue. The calves didn't.

Like loaded dice, like a rigged roulette wheel, or like marked cards, the test was rigged. It was stacked against the God of Israel. The priests talked chance, but they did not really believe in it. They believed in self-interest: in this case, the self-interest of a pair of cows.

The test was designed to favor the cows' self-interest. But, just in case God really was in charge this time, it would cost the nation some of its gold reserves. That was what happened.

Conclusion

Unsophisticated covenant-breakers believe in impersonal chance and impersonal fate. The two concepts are opposed. Covenant-breakers believe in randomness and unbreakable natural law. The two concepts are opposed. Scientific covenant-breakers believe that everything flows (Heraclitus), but everything is amenable to the fixed logical categories of the human mind (Parmenides). The two concepts are opposed. Philosophical covenant-breakers believe in an ever-shifting balance between these rival concepts (dialecticism). This balance cannot be proven logically or demonstrated statistically.

The priests of Philistia talked chance and believed in a rigged test. They saw the golden hemorrhoids as a just-in-case fall-back position: a kind of national insurance policy against the possible existence of the God of the Bible. They believed that a pair of heifers would serve as the means of determining the sovereignty of the rival gods.

The cart went to the city of Beth-shemesh. There, the people looked into the Ark. The Philistines had known better than to do this. God killed 50,070 men (v. 19). The Hebrew word is "males." That made almost as many widows. Men had greater responsibility. They paid a heavier price. This was not random. There is no known disease that kills only adult males. Like the Philistines, they also offered to send the Ark to a different city. Kirjath-jearim accepted. There the Ark remained for two decades (I Sam. 7:2).

Then Samuel began to serve as a judge (v. 3). He led Israel against the Philistines, and Israel won (v. 11).

> So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life (vv. 13–15).

14

TYRANNICAL TAXATION

> *And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the* Lord *will not hear you in that day.*
>
> I SAMUEL 8:14–18

The theocentric principle here is God as the king of Israelite society. He collected an ecclesiastical tithe of rural land's agricultural output for the support of the Levites. A replacement king would demand a tithe on everything.

A. The Desire for Centralization

The Israelites had grown tired of rule by independent judges. The text tells us nothing about Samuel's rule from the day he led the Israelites to victory against Philistia until his old age, when he appointed his sons to serve as judges (I Sam. 88). "And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment. Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (I Sam. 8:3–5).

The Israelites wanted to imitate the nations around them. They wanted a single representative civil ruler. They no longer wanted decentralized rule by judges. They wanted centralization. This was consistent with the history of the nation. They preferred a single voice

of civil authority. "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee" (I Sam. 8:6–8).

God told Samuel to warn them of what would inevitably result from this centralization of civil power. "Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them" (I Sam. 8:9). Samuel then listed the evils that would come upon them. Among these were higher taxes.

B. A Tithe to the King

The king would raise taxes. The nation would pay him a tenth of their production (vv. 15, 17), along with forfeited capital: fields, vineyards, and olive orchards (v. 14). This would be in addition to whatever they were paying local civil magistrates. They did not care. The Israelites still wanted a king. Moses had prophesied this. "When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me…" (Deut. 17:14).

The Israelites had suffered in Egypt from centralized political tyranny. The Pharaoh of Joseph's era extracted an income tax of 20% (Gen. 47:24–26).[1] This had been God's judgment on Egypt. They worshipped a Pharaoh who claimed to be divine. God raised up Joseph to give the Egyptians a taste of tyranny. They would learn what a supposedly divine monarch could collect in a centralized political order. Samuel warned the Israelites of something similar. They did not care. "Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (I Sam. 8:19–20). They wanted a man to do battle in their name. God's name was not enough. "And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city" (I Sam. 8:22).

1. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 35.

The people were willing to pay a tenth of their income to a king. They were willing to pay one man far more than they paid the Levites. The Levites' tithe was a tenth of agricultural production. This compensated them for not possessing an inheritance in rural land. Members of the other tribes possessed more rural land than would have been the case had the Levites not been granted the tithe. In contrast, the king would take a tenth from everyone, city dwellers and country dwellers. He would take more than what an entire tribe received. The priesthood was supported by a tithe placed on only the Levites: one percent of Israel's rural output. The king would take a tenth. The kingship would be the most centralized institution in Israel.

What benefits would a king provide? Leadership in warfare, the people replied. What else? Nothing that the judges did not already provide. The judges provided civil justice. They provided this on a decentralized basis. People could move out of a judge's jurisdiction if he became corrupt, as Samuel's sons did. They could vote with their feet. They could not do this when a king took control of the court system and its enforcement.

A judge could not create international alliances based on marriage. The king could. Solomon later did. The women brought their foreign gods into the household of the king (I Kings 11). The Mosaic law prohibited this. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away" (Deut. 17:17a).

A king could accumulate the weapons of war, including horses and chariots. The Mosaic law prohibited this. "But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way" (Deut. 17:16).[2]

The people did not have to follow a judge into war. At least three of the tribes had refused to come when Deborah called them to assemble (Jud. 5:16–17). The tribes could not easily avoid a national war initiated by a king.

Conclusion

There is an innate desire in men to go to war. James wrote: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1). The Israelites wanted a king like other nations. He would lead them into battle.

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

They did not care about higher taxes. They did not care about kingly marital preferences. They wanted to be able to be proud about their nation's military prowess. For this, they needed a king. He needed taxes. They were ready to pay.

For the modern world to return to the taxation level of the Pharaoh in Joseph's day, governments would have to cut taxes and spending by at least 50% in the lower-tax industrial nations. They would have to cut by 75% to reach the tax level that Samuel warned against.

Voters may complain about high taxes, but they do not rebel. They do not replace high-tax politicians with low-tax politicians. They do not perceive that, after World War I began in 1914, the world moved into tax tyranny. The free nations are tax tyrannies by comparison with ancient Egypt or ancient anywhere. The voters do not perceive this, so conditioned are they by tax-funded education, which sings the praises of the modern welfare-warfare state.

Voters want centralization. They want to be proud of their chief national leader. God has assessed this preference and has found it wanting. "And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands" (I Sam. 10:19).

Switzerland has the longest tradition of political freedom of any large modern nation. It has no national leader. It has a rotating president who possesses no independent power and departs after one year. There is no head of state. There is a decentralized citizen militia. The nation stays neutral in foreign wars. It does not start wars. It is rarely invaded. The last period of non-neutrality was under Napoleon (1798–1815). Hitler decided not to invade: too high a price, no strategic payoff, and a decentralized militia to fight in the mountains, where all bridges and tunnels would have been blown up as a defensive strategy. The national government announced in advance that any post-invasion announcement of a surrender should be ignored.[3] The nation has been a tax haven. It is rich. The only people who are afraid of Switzerland are tax collectors in other nations.

3. Stephen P. Halbrook, *Target Switzerland: Swiss Armed Neutrality in World War II* (Rockville Centre, New York: Sarpedon, 1998), p. 95. See also his speech to the University Club of New York City, July 21, 1998.

CONCLUSION TO SAMUEL

As the last judge in Israel's history, Samuel departed gracefully. He knew that his rebellious sons had provoked the people to demand a king (I Sam. 8:1–4). He knew that Israel was about to enter a time of greatness under David. But he also knew that the people had rejected God when they rejected the system of local judges.

The economic message of Samuel is that God is in total control in history. He arranges things according to His pleasure. He has given mankind laws and courts. If people are faithful, they will triumph, just as his mother had triumphed over his potrntial stepmother, just as he had replaced Eli's evil sons as the true heir of Eli. To the extent that he wrote of economic affairs, he declared the sovereignty of God, not as capricious, but as the law-giver and sanctions-bringer. When the people chose a king, they chose higher taxes.

INTRODUCTION TO KINGS AND CHRONICLES

> *And the king of Assyria did carry away Israel unto Assyria, and put them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes: Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, and all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them.*
>
> II KINGS 18:11–12

The books of Kings and Chronicles are mostly about God's historical sanctions, and these were mostly negative. The historical books from the kingship of Solomon to the two captivities are extensions of the books of Samuel. They manifested in history Samuel's warning to the Israelites against kings (I Sam. 8).[1] The Israelites never learned that what they believed and did would come back on them through their kings. When they rebelled, their kings rebelled. Late in Israel's pre-exilic history, on three occasions, they were given good kings. All three times, they continued to offer sacrifices in high places.[2] Because they committed liturgical evil in high places, rulers in high places did evil things to them. Finally, they were removed from Israelite kings. They were ruled by empires. It is worth noting that they never again returned to the worship of foreign gods. They never again worshipped in high places.

These historical books record the character of civil government under kings. They record the economic sanctions. Sometimes, there were positive economic sanctions. Most often, the sanctions were

1. Chapter 14.

2. "But the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places" (II Kings 12:3). "Save that the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burnt incense still on the high places" (II Kings 15:4). "Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD" (II Kings 15:35).

negative. Under Solomon, things went well. There was peace, prosperity, and extensive foreign trade. But the blessings of God hardened Solomon in his evil ways: polygamy and polytheism. He took the blessings for granted. His son was to take high taxes for granted. Then he lost the kingdom in a revolt initiated by even higher taxes.

There were positive sanctions for prophets and those around them. Elijah lived on miraculous food (I Kings 17).[3] Elisha knew the future well enough to make accurate forecasts of commodity prices (II Kings 6).[4]

The two books tell us that rulers, both civil and ecclesiastical, have their own agendas. Rulers pursue these agendas in the name of God.

No matter how many times God provided blessings to kings, they turned against Him. Then came cursings. Sometimes the people repented. Occasionally, the rulers repented. But the nation always returned to evil, like a dog to its vomit. "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (Prov. 26:11).

First and Second Chronicles offer almost no economic information that does not appear in the books of Kings. The first 10 chapters of First Chronicles provide a detailed genealogy of the tribes. These genealogies served as the basis of inheritance.

3. Chapter 21.
4. Chapter 26.

15

WISDOM AND WEALTH

> *And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.*
>
> I KINGS 3:11–13

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer in history.

A. Rendering Judgment

Solomon recognized that his supreme task as king of Israel was to render judgment in disputes. He had to apply the Mosaic law to specific circumstances. Rendering judgment is point four of the biblical covenant.[1]

His bad judgment had already begun. He did not perceive this. "And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about" (I Kings 3:1). This practice of marital alliances with covenant-breakers would undermine his kingdom by the end of his life.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

That was not the limit of his defective judgment. He allowed false worship. "Only the people sacrificed in high places, because there was no house built unto the name of the LORD, until those days" (v. 2). The lack of a building was no excuse. It got worse. "And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places" (v. 3). Step by step, his life of covenantal compromise had begun.

God appeared to him in a dream. He asked Solomon what he wanted from God (v. 5). Solomon responded with an acknowledgment of God's role as the sanctions-bringer. "And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day" (v. 6). David was righteous; he received God's mercy. This mercy involved placing Solomon on the throne. This was a matter of inheritance: point five.[2] If continued, Solomon's name would be established down through the ages, until Shiloh arrived (Gen. 49:10).

He then professed humility. "And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in" (v. 7). Compared to the task of rendering judgment for a nation, his abilities were too limited. He had already shown such lack of judgment. God knew.

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing" (v. 10). God then rewarded him with good judgment. He also granted him visible riches. He had not asked for riches. Solomon would become legendary for his wisdom and his wealth. The nation also grew wealthy.

There is a system of predictable sanctions in history. Adherence to biblical law produces external blessings. Solomon understood this. God then promised him long life. "And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days" (v. 14).

Solomon responded with a liturgical act. "And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace offerings, and made a feast to all his servants" (v. 15). The text then tells the story of the two harlots and the living child. Solomon's threat to have the infant cut in half has come down through the ages as an example of his wisdom

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 5. North, ch. 5.

in rendering civil judgment. "And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other" (vv. 24–25).

Let us be clear about what he did. He lied to the women and his guards. He had no intention of killing the child. The lie worked. The two women believed he would do this. The mother responded to this threat. "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." So did the other woman. "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it" (v. 26). She was motivated by envy: the desire to destroy the other woman's child, even though this would not benefit her. Solomon recognized whose story was true.

God had given him the ability to render good judgment. "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment" (v. 28). This soon made his kingship unique in Israel's history.

> So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year (I Kings 10:23–25).

Conclusion

Solomon asked for wisdom. He needed it in two areas: marriage and liturgy. He never did escape these two flaws. The flaws grew much worse in his old age. He did not root them out while he still could. They undermined his kingdom.

He was a man of superb judgment regarding disputes between residents of Israel. It was self-judgment that was his weak link.

16

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF TRADE

> *Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the* Lord *this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people.*
>
> I KINGS 5:6–7

The theocentric principle that undergirds this passage is God's absolute sovereignty in acts of creation. He is not dependent on the creation. He is the source of the creation. This is an incommunicable attribute. Mankind does not possess this degree of sovereignty. Thus, men must cooperate in order to increase their productivity. They are dependent on the creation, including each other.

A. Wisdom, Trade, and Peace

Solomon's goal was to build God's house. God had been specific. He wanted a house of cedar (II Sam. 7:7). Cedars grew in Lebanon, a region controlled by Sidon. Solomon therefore had to enlist the cooperation of the Sidonians. The Sidonians were the recognized experts in cedar-based construction. They had long specialized in working with cedar. Sidon had a competitive advantage internationally in the construction of cedar-based structures.

When Solomon sought a trade arrangement with Hiram, Hiram gave this response. "My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be dis-

charged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household" (v. 9). There was a potential trade arrangement: cedars for food. Solomon accepted the offer (vv. 12–13).

1. Peace

The text provides crucially important information: "And the LORD gave Solomon wisdom, as he promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together" (v. 12). God gave Solomon wisdom. This wisdom led to a league of peace between the two men, which meant a league of peace between two nations.

Had the two nations been at war, there would not have been an open exchange of food for cedars. There might have been some surreptitious trade, but nothing that could be admitted publicly by either king.[1]

It is often said that free trade reduces the likelihood of warfare between trading nations. This argument rests on a fundamental principle of economics: *when costs increase, output is reduced*. Free trade creates mutual dependence of residents in both nations. The cost of warfare rises when mutual dependence increases. Why? Because of losses sustained when the division of labor is reduced in both nations. Specialization declines. Therefore, output per unit of resource input declines. It is therefore cheaper for non-trading nations to go to war with each other than trading nations. Put differently, the price of war is higher for trading nations. As economics teaches, *when prices rise, less is demanded*. When the price of war increases, less war is demanded (other things being equal).

Solomon and Hiram made a league of peace. This was not a covenant. A covenant is established through a mutual oath under God. Is-

1. During World War II, the central bankers of the warring nations met in neutral Switzerland at the Bank for International Settlements. They settled their accounts in gold, which was held in Switzerland. The leaders of all the warring nations knew about this, but these meetings were top secret. The public never found out until after the war ended. Even today, only a few people have ever heard this story. So crucial was the continuation of trade that both sides believed that monetary cooperation was vital for their respective war efforts. Anyway, their central bankers and commercial bankers believed this. Their opinion predominated. The BIS was in Basle, close to the German border. Axis influence was strong. Yet the president of the BIS was an American in the war years, despite the fact that the United States had not officially joined the BIS. It was a very strange arrangement. Gianni Toniolo and Piet Clement, *Central Bank Cooperation at the Bank for International Settlements, 1930–1973* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 7.

rael was prohibited from making covenants with the city-states of Canaan (Ex. 23:31–33; 34:15; Deut. 7:2–4). Sidon was not inside Canaan, but it did not worship the same God. Therefore, no covenant between Hiram and Solomon was lawful biblically. On the other hand, there could be a peace treaty between the two kings. There could be economic exchange between the two nations. These arrangements could be abrogated lawfully by the two parties. Why? Because the league was not a covenant. It was not judicially comparable to a marriage.

2. Benefits

The story of Solomon and the king of Sidon is unique in the Old Testament. The senior representatives of two rival confessional kingdoms had respect for each other. Each was willing to please the other. Solomon paid for services rendered. Hiram delivered the goods for payment rendered. But the cooperation went beyond financial gain. Hiram knew that Solomon was building a house for a rival God. Solomon told him.

> And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians. And it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the LORD this day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people (I Kings 5:5–7).

A foreign covenant-breaker understood the benefits of wisdom and civil justice. Moses had said this would happen.

> Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8)[2]

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 8.

The agreement between the two kings offered economic growth for both nations. Both kingdoms prospered economically. This raises a theological question: Does free trade and peace, both of which are biblical goals, mean that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of man grow together? Do both benefit? In other words, does biblical law subsidize the kingdom of man? If so, in what way? Why?

B. Contractual Equality, Covenantal Hierarchy

Hiram was the subordinate in this relationship. Solomon was acting on behalf of the God of the Bible. The cedars of Lebanon would grace the temple. Hiram would receive payment, but the wealth of Hiram's nation would serve to extend the perception that God is sovereign. God's house would reflect this sovereignty aesthetically. The temple would last long after the payment to Hiram would be consumed. "And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year" (v. 11).

In terms of the economic relationship between the two men, meaning the two societies, there was *contractual equality*. Each surrendered ownership of something in order to gain something. The exchanges were voluntary. Each believed he was better off after the exchanges than before. Had this not been the case, there would have been no further exchanges. People do not exchange goods and services in order to become worse off.

Yet despite the contractual equality between Solomon and Hiram, there was *covenantal inequality*. This inequality had to do with point five of the biblical covenant: succession.[3] The temple would bind the Israelites together until the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam. The temple would bind Judah and Benjamin together thereafter. After the return from Babylon, the rebuilt temple became the central reference point for the Jews. The memory of the original temple provided continuity, both confessional and historical. There was no comparable continuity for Sidon.

This raises a fundamental difference between humanistic free market economic theory and Christian economic theory. *Humanistic theory proposes no hierarchy of exchange*. Neither party has legal authority

3. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 5. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1987] 2010), ch. 5.

over the other. Each party benefits. Neither party can be said to benefit more. Why not? Because, according to subjective value theory, it is impossible to compare interpersonal subjective value. This was first argued by Lionel Robbins. He denied that there can be scientifically valid interpersonal comparisons of subjective utility. This is because there is no objective measure of subjective utility.[4]

In contrast, Christian economics assesses exchange in terms of the extension of the two kingdoms. The benefits of God's kingdom compound over time when society's members adhere to God's law (Deut. 28:1–14).[5] The benefits gained by covenant-breakers are eventually squandered (Deut. 28:15–68) or else inherited by covenant-keepers. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[6]

Thus, there is *a hierarchy of authority in exchanges* between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. The covenant-keeper is in a stronger position. This is because of *inheritance and compounding*. The inheritance of the covenant-breaker is cut short. "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 20:5). The inheritance of the covenant-keeper compounds. "And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:6).[7] The word "thousands" refers here to generations, not population size. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9).

Put a different way, humanistic economics examines exchange in terms of the plans of the participants. The analysis is future-oriented—teleological—with respect to expected *individual* benefits. Christian economics adds an element of *corporate teleology*: the kingdom of God. Voluntary exchange is teleological with respect to covenantal individual exchange and covenantal corporate exchange. In covenantal individual exchange, both parties expect to benefit. There is no hier-

4. Lionel Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London: Macmillan, 1932), ch. 6.

5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 69.

6. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 40.

7. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 22.

archy of authority. In covenantal corporate exchange, there is a hierarchy. Covenant-keeping societies extend the kingdom of God at the expense of the kingdom of Mammon. *Covenantal corporate exchange is ultimately a zero-sum activity*. God profits in history at the expense of Satan and his covenantal adherents.[8] God profits in eternity in the same way. So do His disciples.

Humanistic economists assume a level judicial playing field: *equal protection of property, which includes the right of exchange*. So do Christian economics. Humanistic economists deny the epistemological relevance of corporate teleology. Christian economists affirm it. *The economic playing field is not level*. God's kingdom has an advantage: long-term economic growth. This is attained through obedience to God's Bible-revealed law-order.

C. Who Won? Who Lost?

Solomon and Hiram were judicial equals when it came to exchange. They were not equals with respect to the outcome of their exchanges. Solomon had the upper hand. He acted on behalf of the kingdom of God: point two of the biblical covenant model.[9]

Hiram had what Solomon wanted: cedars of Lebanon. Solomon had what Hiram wanted: food. Each of them wanted these things as representatives of the residents of their respective nations. Representation is point two of the biblical covenant model. The two kings came to a mutually beneficial arrangement: cedars for food.

To make this arrangement work, they established a league of peace between themselves and therefore between the residents of the two nations. This was not a covenant established by a self-maledictory oath under God: point four of the biblical covenant model.[10] This was a contract that supplemented the trade agreement. The residents gained peace because the two leaders established peace. The leaders established peace because they wanted a superior situation for those whom they represented.

Hiram prospered. His people prospered. Yet the kingdom of God was benefitted more. After almost five centuries, God got His house. The Sidonians received food. There was greater continuity for God's

8. I am assuming here that postmillennialism is true. Amillennialism necessarily implies that Satan's kingdom (civilization) in history prospers at the expense of God's kingdom. Premillennialism necessarily implies that this is true until Jesus comes again to set up His earthly kingdom.

9. Sutton, *That You May Prosper*, ch. 2. North, *Unconditional Surrender*, ch. 2.

10. *Ibid*., ch. 4. North, ch. 4.

house. Both nations prospered, but the Israelites prospered more than the Sidonians. We know this, because God imputed greater value to His house than to the Sidonians' bellies.

> Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar? (II Sam. 7:5–7)

Conclusion

This analysis leads to a fundamental principle of Christian economics, one which is denied by humanistic economics: *voluntary exchange between the members of the two kingdoms extends God's kingdom more than it extends man's kingdom*. God's kingdom increases at the expense of man's kingdom. Trade is not a zero-sum economic activity for the participants. The exchanging parties benefit. But voluntary trade benefits the kingdom of God more than it benefits the kingdom of man, assuming only that the things traded are not morally corrupt. Although the kingdom of man expands its wealth, this is short-lived. "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Prov. 13:22).[11]

If premillennial and amillennial pastors were scrupulously honest with their congregations, they would preach the opposite view forthrightly and often, namely, that Satan will win in pre-Second Coming history because his representatives will win. This view leads to a conclusion: all economic exchanges with covenant-breakers contribute to the triumph of Satan's kingdom in history.

11. North, *Wisdom and Dominion*, ch. 41.

17

THE BIBLE'S CRUCIAL DATE MARKER

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

I KINGS 6:1

This is an important date marker in the Bible. Without this reference and the parallel reference in First Chronicles, it would be much more difficult to establish biblical chronology. Biblical chronology is at war with the chronologies of the textbooks on ancient history. There is no escape from this war.[1]

A. Nebuchadnezzar's Victory

To determine the year in which Solomon began building the temple, we must work backward from a date that we can narrow down to a two-year period: the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. A widely accepted date is 586 B.C. The two other dates are 587 and 588. Most scholars choose either 586 or 587.[2] I have decided to choose 586, in deference to a seeming majority of specialized scholars.[3]

Ezekiel informs us that it was 390 years from the division of the monarchy under Rehoboam to the fall of Jerusalem.

1. I agree with Floyd Nolen Jones: biblical chronology is one of the three major battlefields of modern biblical warfare. The other two are higher criticism of biblical texts and Darwinian evolution. Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 15th ed. (Green Forest, Arkansas: Green Leaf Press, 2005), pp. 7–8. I have relied on his book for the presentation in this chapter.

2. Herman H. Hoeh, "When Did Nebuchadrezzar Conquer Jerusalem?" (1976), edited by Paul Finch (2005).

3. Jones accepted this date: *op. cit.*, p. 23.

> Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt bear their iniquity. For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou bear the iniquity of the house of Israel (Ezek. 4:4–5).

Adding 390 to 586 gives us 976 B.C.[4] That was the last year of Solomon's reign. Maybe we could argue 977 B.C. It does not matter for this chapter. We know from two passages that Solomon ruled 40 years.[5] Adding 40 to 976, we get 1016 B.C. for the beginning of his reign. In the fourth year of his reign, he began to build the temple.

> Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign (II Chron. 3:1–2).

Subtracting four years from 1016, we get 1012 B.C. This is the anchor date.

First Kings 6:1 is specific: the exodus took place 480 years before. Adding 480 years to 1012, we get 1492 B.C. as the date of the exodus, give or take a few years, depending on the date of the fall of Jerusalem and the dating by month of Solomon's coronation. Again, this variation matters little.

B. Abraham's Covenant

Paul wrote that it was 430 years from God's covenant with Abraham to the exodus. "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect" (Gal. 3:17). That identifies the date of the covenant: 1922 B.C.

Here is a problem. Which covenant was Paul referring to? There was the promise given to Abraham when God changed Abram's name to Abraham (Gen. 17). There was an earlier promise, when God told Abram that he would have heirs, and these heirs would return to con-

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4. Jones said it should be 975 B.C. Why? He said this: "inclusive numbering minus 1." *Idem*. My view is that if an author does not precisely explain what he is talking about—"inclusive numbering minus 1"—the reader is entitled to conclude "case not proven." Chalk it up to the reader's ignorance. If an author is not clear, his reader is entitled to his ignorance. The text says 390. I stick with the text.

5. "And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years" (I Kings 11:42). "And Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years" (II Chron. 9:30).

quer Canaan in the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16).[6] The earlier promise came 14 years before God renewed His covenant with Abram. He was 99 years old at that time (Gen. 17:1). He was 86 when Hagar bore Ishmael (Gen. 16:16). He was therefore 85 when God made the first covenant with Abram.

I believe that Paul was referring to the initial covenant. Why? Because this was the initial reference involved the promise of seed. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). But Genesis 17 also mentions seed. Genesis 15 has promise of inheritance of land in the fourth generation. This was the exodus and conquest. But, more important theologically, is this crucial verse: "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 16:6). This is the passage Paul quotes. "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Gal. 3:6). The context of Paul's remarks was the initial covenant, not the renewed covenant 14 years later.

The date of this covenant was 1922 B.C. How long had Abram been in Canaan when Ishmael was conceived? A decade. "And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife" (Gen. 16:3). So, the date of Abram's entry into Canaan was 1932 B.C.

Abram did not leave Haran until his father Terah died.

> And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran. Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee (Gen. 11:32–12:1).

Abram obeyed. "So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran" (Gen. 12:4).

Terah was born 205 years before Abram went to Canaan: 1932 + 205 = 2137 B.C. From this point on, dating Noah's Flood is duck soup. The chronology of Genesis 11 is the most precise in the Bible.

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6. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

C. Genesis 11

Because people usually ignore genealogies in the Bible, I reproduce it here.

> These are the generations of Shem: Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood (v. 10).
>
> And Shem lived after he begat Arphaxad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 11).
>
> And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah (v. 12).
>
> And Arphaxad lived after he begat Salah four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 13).
>
> And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber (v. 14).
>
> And Salah lived after he begat Eber four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 15).
>
> And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg (v. 16).
>
> And Eber lived after he begat Peleg four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 17).
>
> And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu (v. 18).
>
> And Peleg lived after he begat Reu two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 19).
>
> And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug (v. 20).
>
> And Reu lived after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 21).
>
> And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor (v. 22).
>
> And Serug lived after he begat Nahor two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters (v. 23).
>
> And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah (v. 24).

This is the most detailed genealogy in the Bible. It is the only genealogy that provides the ages of fathers at the birth of the sons in Abraham's covenant line. This genealogy does not allow any wiggle room for those who want to discover long ages of gaps in the genealogy. There are no gaps. Adding the ages of each father, plus two years from Arphaxad to the Flood, we get 222 years from the Flood to the birth of Terah. Then we add this to 2137 B.C. We get 2359 B.C. as the date of Noah's Flood. Wiggle room: the date of the fall of Je-

rusalem (two years), the date of Solomon's death (one year), the date he began the temple (part of one year), and the date of the relevant Abrahamic covenant (14 years).

D. The Inescapable War Over Chronology

Think through a few of the implications of this date. In every world history book, we are told of events that happened earlier than 2359 B.C. We are told of great civilizations that built cities. We are told of the bronze age and the stone age. We are told of cave paintings on walls drawn by people 30,000 years before Christ.

The Bible says all of these estimates are wrong.

There is very little chronological wiggle room for people who say that they believe that the Genesis account is accurate. If that account is accurate, then the three sons of Noah began the re-population of the earth no earlier than 2359 B.C. There was no other surviving family. We know this because of the renewed covenant between God and Noah. It recapitulated the covenant God made with Adam.

> And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things (Gen. 9:1–3).[7]

This was God's covenant renewal with the biological and covenantal replacements of Adam and Eve: the sons of Noah and their wives. It was a representative covenant that still applies to all of Noah's heirs. The races of mankind came later, probably shortly after the tower of Babel, less than two centuries later. God altered the genetic inheritances of mankind. This was not some slow evolutionary process. This was done within a two-century period. The science of genetics is governed by a chronology. Which chronology? The Bible's or Darwinism's?

The cultures of the world are less than 5,000 years old.

This means that Christians must do the research necessary to rewrite history and archeology, with this goal in mind: to discover the overlapping accounts in what appear to be sequential genealogies of ancient kings. They must also find another way to categorize the sequence of civilizations (meaning overlaid mounds of broken pottery and rusted tools) besides stone, bronze, and iron.

7. North, *Sovereignty and Dominion*, ch. 18.

The world history textbooks published by Christian fundamentalist textbook publishers do not alert their young readers to this problem. They tell readers about the Egyptians, who supposedly built pyramids in 5000 B.C. It is as if the authors had never read Genesis 11. They suffer from intellectual schizophrenia: a two-chronologies timeline.

Almost no one in Christian academia wants to begin train up generations of historians and archaeologists who understand the war over chronology and who are ready to get involved. History teachers remain silent. They do not suggest research paradigms to unravel the enigmas of non-biblical chronologies. They should point to retired chemistry professor Donovan Courville's self-published book, *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications* (1971) as a model of what needs to be done. They are unaware of the book.

This game of let's pretend does Christianity no good.

Conclusion

Economic growth and population growth took place far more rapidly than the humanist chronologies suggest. Between the birth of Arphaxad sometime around 2357 B.C. and the exodus in approximately 1492 B.C., population grew so rapidly that the Israelites departed from Egypt with about 2.5 million people, leaving behind a larger Egyptian population that had enslaved this huge population.[8]

The Israelites moved into a region so densely populated that it took seven years for the Israelites to conquer Canaan partially.

> And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day (Deut. 4:37–38).

> Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; That they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty (Josh. 10:1–2).

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8. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 1, *Representation and Dominion* (1985), ch. 1.

This does not deal with China, India, Southeast Asia, Mesoamerica, and all the other people's of the earth in 1492 B.C.

There is lots of academic work to be done, or else lots of compromises to be made with the doctrine of biblical infallibility. The six-day creation movement has ignored this historiographical challenge. Its defenders have imagined that this battle over chronology is confined to biology, geology, paleontology, and astrophysics. They have steadfastly avoided asking chronological questions with respect to civilizations.

Immanual Velikovsky recognized that astronomy and ancient chronology are intertwined. He sought a scientific answer to the origin of the solar system: *Worlds in Collision* (1950). He found it, he believed, in the chronology and descriptive account of the exodus: *Ages in Chaos* (1952). He attempted to reconstruct ancient chronology and astrophysics. He remained a fringe figure and outcast for all of his academic career.[9] That is the necessary price. He is to be applauded for his attempt.

Choose this day which chronology you will serve.

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9. Alfred de Grazia (ed.), *The Velikovsky Affair* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1966).

18

A PRAYER INVOKING GOD'S SANCTIONS

> *And Solomon stood before the altar of the* Lord *in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said,* Lord *God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart.*
>
> I KINGS 8:22–23

So begins Solomon's remarkable prayer. The temple had been completed (I Kings 7:51). The nation had been assembled in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:1). The Ark of the Covenant had been delivered to the temple (v. 4). God's glory had filled the temple (v. 10). Solomon reminded God of what he has done. "I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in for ever" (v. 13). He has reminded the people that God raised up David, and God promised David that his son would build the temple (v. 20). God has brought this to pass (v. 21). Then he began his prayer. "And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven" (v. 22).

His prayer had these aspects: praise of God as unique; the God of the covenant and mercy (v. 23); the god of Israel (v. 24). This God dwells in heaven, which cannot contain Him (v. 27). Yet He will dwell in this house. "That thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place of which thou hast said, My name shall be there: that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer which thy servant shall make toward this place" (v. 29). Solomon then offered himself as a representative of the people: "And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place:

and when thou hearest, forgive" (v. 30). He then prayed to God to respect the prayers of the Israelites.

A. Final Court of Appeal

When rivals swore civil oaths in a court, judges could not decide who was telling the truth. God had to decide.

> If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness (vv. 31–32).

There are limits on men's knowledge. There are none on God's knowledge. Men render imperfect judgment. God renders perfect judgment. Solomon invoked God as the supreme Judge. God had to intervene to separate the criminal from the victim. Solomon implored God to intervene in history and impose sanctions in terms of the truth.

This points to an appeals court that lies beyond the final earthly court. A court outside of history assesses history. It then imposes sanctions in history.

The existence of this court provides covenant-keeping man with hope in perfect judgment. He need not fret when covenant-breakers prosper in their wickedness. He can go about his business, knowing that God will sort out all claims perfectly.

Solomon did not call on God to restrict His judgment to eternity. He called on God to intervene in history. He believed that history is not autonomous. He saw a correspondence between evil and negative sanctions, between righteousness and positive sanctions. He saw the world as under God's law and God's predictable sanctions. He called on God to make these visible sanctions even more predictable.

B. Captivity and Return

When the nation sins and is carried off, Solomon prayed, do not leave it in a foreign land.

> When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers (vv. 33–34).

Moses had warned them that God would deal with them as Canaanites if they followed the gods of Canaan.

> And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your God (Deut. 8:19–20).[1]

Moses had prophesied that there would come such a day.

> That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:3–5).[2]

Solomon realized that this will come true, and He asked God to honor His word that Moses had given to the conquest generation.

C. Meteorological Sanctions

There are negative sanctions imposed by nature. Solomon recognized this and implored God to honor His covenant law.

> When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance (vv. 35–36).

Moses had warned them about this. The Promised Land would remain a covenantal agent. God used hornets to drive out the Canaanites (Deut. 7:20; Josh. 24:12). He would use nature to plague the people if they committed similar abominations.

Take care, Moses said, "That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you" (Lev. 18:28).[3] "Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments,

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1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 23.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 72.

3. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 10.

and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out" (Lev. 20:22).[4] The land would become their enemy.

The goal of these negative sanctions was national repentance.

> If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpiller; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers (vv. 37–40).

D. The Stranger in the Gates

Solomon prayed on behalf of the covenantal stranger.

> Moreover concerning a stranger [*nokree*], that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house; Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for: that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that this house, which I have builded, is called by thy name (vv. 41–43).

The strangers would come and had come. The Mosaic law was a tool of evangelism.

> Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8)[5]

E. The God of Battle

There would be wars, Solomon knew. Israel's defender was God.

4. *Ibid*., ch. 21.
5. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 8.

> If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the LORD toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name: Then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause (vv. 44–45).

This was a unique reference to the need of the God's holy army to *pray toward Jerusalem*. When they obey, Solomon implored God, answer their prayer. Give them victory. For the God of historical sanctions, this is easy. Solomon expected this. He believed that historical causation is based on covenantal law.

He repeated his invocation of protection if the nation is carried out of the land (vv. 46–47). "And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name" (v. 48). Why should God do this? "For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron" (v. 51). He is the God of the covenant. They are the people of this covenant. "For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD" (v. 53).

Conclusion

Solomon publicly prayed to God, invoking covenant sanctions. He affirmed his faith that the God of the covenant is reliable. The negative corporate sanctions to come would be in terms of His law and its sanctions. Similarly, the deliverance of Israel would be based on His law and its sanctions. These sanctions were grounded in His mercy. Prayer was required, Solomon implied, to gain the benefits of the covenant. So, he ended his prayers with a final supplication, one based on the demonstrated reliability of God's promises.

> And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant. The LORD our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers.

> And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the LORD, be nigh unto the LORD our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: That all the people of the earth may know that the LORD is God, and that there is none else. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the LORD our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day (vv. 55–61).

God heard his prayer. "And the LORD said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (I Kings 9:3).

19

FEEDBACK LOOPS

> *And they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem.*
>
> I KINGS 10:25–26

The theocentric principle governing this passage is God as the defender of His covenant and its people.

A. Laws of Kingship

Moses in Deuteronomy 17 laid down laws governing kings of Israel. This was before there was a king in Israel, other than God. God regarded it as a rejection of His kingship when the people told Samuel to anoint a king. "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7). Still, God provided guidelines for kings. The people could judge a king's performance by how well he adhered to these laws.

> When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the LORD hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives

> to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold (Deut. 17:14–17).[1]

More than any other king in Israel's history, Solomon violated these laws. He was the richest king. He had the least trouble with foreign wars. Yet he assembled a huge fighting force. He trusted in chariots. This was sin. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Deut. 20:1). Solomon did not believe this. "And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen: and he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he bestowed in the cities for chariots, and with the king at Jerusalem" (I Kings 10:26).

There were actually cities devoted to chariots. "And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion" (I Kings 9:19). He had a business of importing and exporting chariots. "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means" (v. 29). The passage in Second Chronicles makes it clear that this was a business. "And Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price. And they fetched up, and brought forth out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so brought they out horses for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, by their means" (II Chron. 1:16–17).

B. Wealth Accumulation

Solomon accumulated gold. He could not get enough gold.

> And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to king Solomon (I Kings 9:27–28).

> And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such abundance

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 42.

> of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon (I Kings 10:10).

> Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold (I Kings 10:14).

> And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon (I Kings 10:21).

He was obsessed with gold. He could have lowered taxes. He could have given away the gold brought to him by other kings and the queen of Sheba. But he played the role of pagan king, and pagan kings were expected to own gold.

He knew God's law. There is no indication that he did not follow these Mosaic rules governing kings.

> And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel (Deut. 17:18–20).[2]

His problem was that he did not apply what he read to his own circumstances.

C. Self-Government Under God

There was no higher civil authority than the king within the borders of Israel. Kings outside Israel did not want to fight Solomon. More likely, they wanted to meet him. Word of his wealth and wisdom had spread. Among kings, he was a celebrity.

This made it imperative that Solomon place himself under the law of God. He would have to judge his own actions by the terms of God's law. If he failed to do this, there was no civil agency higher than the king that could bring negative sanctions against him. This placed him outside the normal boundaries. A prophet could challenge him, but none did. The priesthood could challenge him, but it never did. God allowed him free rein to test him. At the end of his life, he failed the test. He did not subject himself to the Mosaic law's rules for kings.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 14:G.

D. Sanctions

The sanctions were seemingly positive: fame, fortune, and women. He was universally acclaimed. This placed him in a dangerous condition. Because the sanctions were positive, they served as a positive feedback loop. The more he received, the more he pursued evil. By accumulating forbidden wealth, he became enmeshed in a perverse feedback loop. The positive sanctions encouraged him to ever-greater violations of the law governing kings.

The Mosaic law did not forbid other men from accumulating gold and silver. They did not possess civil power. Their wealth was not a threat to the nation. A king's wealth was, for it persuaded him that he was doing all the right things. The Mosaic law established a unique, historically unprecedented set of restrictions on kings. The Mosaic law warned kings not to accumulate what in private life would not be prohibited. A citizen is surrounded by restraints. A king is not. A successful king accumulates wealth as a sign of his success. "If you've got it, flaunt it!"[3] The centralization of power is a threat to the nation, both internally and internationally. Wealth attracts enemies, as Hezekiah's successors learned to their dismay.

> At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.
>
> Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (II Kings 20:12–18).

He, too, accumulated gold and silver for himself. "And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasur-

3. The phrase comes from the comedy film, *The Producers* (1967, 2005).

ies for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of pleasant jewels" (II Chron. 32:27). Great wealth was a snare to both Solomon and Hezekiah. God's judgment on Hezekiah and the nation resulted in the destruction of the temple that Solomon had built. The accumulated gold was inherited by the Babylonian Empire. Yet this took place over a century after Hezekiah conducted his grand tour.

God did impose some negative sanctions. God raised up Hadad the Edomite to trouble Solomon (I Kings 11:14). He also raised up Rezon, who reigned over Syria. This man troubled Solomon all of Solomon's life (I Kings 11:23–25). But these were minor annoyances, not a direct threat to his kingship.

Conclusion

Solomon's visible success led to his downfall. This became clear to all through his son's downfall, which permanently ended David's kingly line in a united nation. Solomon suffered from an exclusively positive feedback loop. He was not wise enough or morally strong enough to follow the Mosaic laws that governed kings. He broke these laws, yet the positive sanctions kept increasing. They ensnared him. The older he got, the less self-governed he became. He became a tool of his multiple wives. He became a polytheist, following their gods as well as Israel's God.

His son forfeited both the kingship and his father's wealth.

The division of the kingdom weakened Judah militarily. "And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made" (I Kings 14:25–26). Second Chronicles adds this of the rulers of Judah: "Nevertheless they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries" (II Chron. 12:8). God would teach them a lesson—the same lesson that He had been teaching Israel from the days of the judges. They would find no tender mercies under foreign kings and foreign gods.

Solomon had accumulated gold as a steward of God. God transferred it to a covenant-breaking steward: Shishak. Better that a covenant-breaker should get positive feedback than a nation which had defied God through a king with too many wives, too many chariots,

and too much gold. Only for David's sake did Solomon get away with all this.

> Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen (I Kings 11:11–13).

Rehoboam was disinherited by God for his own bad judgment. But that bad judgment was the context of God's judgment against his father. The Mosaic Covenant's negative feedback loop reappeared with a vengeance.

20

TAX REVOLT

> *And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.*
>
> I KINGS 12:14

This theocentric focus of this passage is the sovereignty of God in bringing His word to pass.

Because Solomon had married 700 wives and kept 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3), he was led astray to worship other gods (v. 4). God had warned future kings of Israel about this. "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold" (Deut. 17:17). God therefore told Solomon that his kingdom would not persevere.

> Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son (I Kings 11:11–12).

Rehoboam would surely lose the kingdom. God did not say how or why, only that it would inevitably take place. It took place because of high taxes.

A basic principle of economics is this: at a higher price, less is demanded. This includes civil government. If taxes go too high in relation to perceived benefits, people resist paying. They want less civil government.

Immediately after the people made Rehoboam king (I Kings 12:1), a delegation came to him (v. 3). They had a complaint and a promise.

"Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee" (v. 4). This was a threat. If he did not make their yoke lighter, they would not serve him.

He said that he would seek counsel. This was wise. His father had written, "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). First, he consulted the old men (v. 6). They gave him excellent advice: become a public servant. "And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever" (v. 7). He ignored this counsel. He then consulted younger men (v. 8). They gave him poor advice: to use power to compel obedience.

> And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions (vv. 10–11).

When the people returned, he conveyed this message (v. 14). Why was he so foolish? Because God had blinded him. "Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the LORD, that he might perform his saying, which the LORD spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (v. 15). Ahijah had told Jeroboam that he would inherit the tribes (I Kings 11:29–31). In response to Rehoboam's declaration, the people of the 10 tribes revolted against him (I Kings 12:16).

When Rehoboam assembled an army to suppress this revolt, God sent a messenger to him forbidding this. "Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the LORD, and returned to depart, according to the word of the LORD" (v. 24). This permanently divided the tribal lands. After the Israelites' return from the exile, members of the same tribes did not live with each other in the same tribal region.

Conclusion

Rehoboam thought there was no political limit to taxes. He thought that the threat of intense negative civil sanctions—scorpions—would bring the protests to an end. But the people understood better. Their consent was required for a king to collect taxes. A strong king could collect more taxes than a weak king. Solomon had been a strong king. The people of the 10 tribes recognized that Rehoboam was weaker than his father had been. He did not.

The kingship that the Israelites demanded from Samuel had, four kings down the road, resulted in tax tyranny. The 10 northern tribes revolted, but they did not abandon kings. They lived under a series of bad kings who were worse than Rehoboam.

Jeroboam immediately set up a system of corrupt worship as an imitation of the temple. "After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth" (I Kings 13:33–34). God cut off individual kings; the people did not. Finally, God brought the Assyrians to carry them out of the land. Never again did they live under an Israelite king.

21

CONCEALED MIRACLES

And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days.

I KINGS 17:12–15

The theocentric principle here is God's miraculous intervention.

A. Miraculous Obscurity

This is the story of a long-term economic relationship. Elijah needed obscurity to evade King Ahab. The woman needed food. God provided a continuing miracle to provide them both with what they needed.

This relationship began with a revelation from God. "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink" (vv. 9–10). Her response would re-shape her destiny. She was crucial to God's plan for Israel.

King Ahab wanted to locate Elijah. Three and a half years later, the king's servant Obadiah told Elijah, "As the Lord thy God liveth,

there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not" (I Kings 18:10).

How did he achieve concealment? By not interacting with any local residents. He did not look for a job. He did not beg. He did not perform miracles. He went into a house with a widow and her son. In that house there was food. God performed a daily miracle comparable to the manna in the wilderness. "And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah" (v. 16).

Elijah drew little attention. A few people may have noticed him. Some stranger lived, unmarried, with a widow. This was not the sort of arrangement anyone would suspect of a prophet of God from the nation of Israel. This was an ideal cover. It suggested an illicit arrangement.

B. How Poor Was She?

The woman claimed to be near death. This was hyperbolic language. She owned a house. She could have sold it for enough money to buy food. Her remark was intended to show that she was at the end of her rope. She would soon lose her residence. She could not find employment. She would soon be a beggar. Who was she to help a foreigner?

Elijah told her that she and her son would soon be the recipients of a long-term miracle. The little that she possessed would multiply. It would sustain all three of them. She believed him. But she was required to act in faith in order to confirm her trust in him. She had to give him something to eat. That would be the last of her reserves. The next step would be indebtedness, with her house as collateral, or else taking in a renter. Elijah was asking her to take him in. She demonstrated that she was ready to do this, for a price. The price was daily free food.

The miracle was not spectacular. It was not visible to the neighbors. No one would notice. The container of oil and the container of meal would not run out. The three could eat bread every day. This was a recapitulation of the manna. The fare would be boring, but it would keep the three of them alive.

For three and a half years—time, times, and half a time—the three of them would eat. She would have the basics covered. She could work for money if there was a job available. If there wasn't, they would eat. Who would notice that she was not buying food on a daily

basis? There are always competing grocers. One grocer would assume that she had bought from a rival. No one would notice how much food a widow bought, or failed to buy.

He would not be visible locally. He would remain out of sight, out of mind. He would be forgotten by anyone who might have noticed him, months or years earlier. There might be gossip, but for how long. Gossip fades if there is no reminder. The arrangement was ideal for avoiding reminders.

Life for him would be as boring as his meals. But, when you are avoiding capture, boredom is tolerable.

C. Working Capital

He told the woman that she would have free food until rain fell on Israel. She knew there was a time limit on the supply of welfare from God. She had time to develop an alternative stream of income. She could accumulate capital through thrift. She could save whatever her food would have cost. Her free food could serve as a source of capital. She might start a home business. She might get a regular job. When the rain came in Israel, she would have money or tools in reserve.

Elijah gave her another opportunity to make something of herself. She might take it. She might not. But God through Elijah was providing a way out. She had been on the ragged edge financially. She had almost run out of food. Then, without warning, Elijah had appeared. He was a man with a peculiar gift. He could provide free food.

Then he raised her child from the dead. Until that day, she regarded him as a miracle worker. But this was different. "And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" (I Kings 17:24). This indicates that workers of miracles were not unheard of. They were exceptional, just as miracles are exceptional, but the mere possession of this rare ability did not guarantee that someone was sent by God. Performing a resurrection from the dead was proof.

If Elijah could do this, then there was nothing to fear. He would not be there as a household miracle-worker forever, but while he was there, the woman was invulnerable to circumstances. This must have given her hope. The world around her was not so great a threat any longer. She could take risks without fear of a disaster. Her outlook must have changed.

D. When Free Lunches End

Then the free lunches ended, just as the manna ended for Israel. "And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And there was a sore famine in Samaria" (I Kings 18:1–2). The text does not describe his departure. She is never mentioned again in the Old Testament. But she is mentioned in the New Testament. Jesus said:

> And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow (Luke 4:24–26).

The context of these remarks was Jesus' announcement of His fulfillment of a messianic prophecy. He had just read from a scroll of Isaiah.

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country (Luke 4:18–23).[1]

This produced an Ahab-like reaction. "And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (vv. 28–29).

Israel was about to lose its special relationship with God. Jesus would later announce to the Jewish leaders, "Therefore say I unto

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 6.

you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). The unique protection that Israel had enjoyed ever since the last seven plagues on Egypt was about to be removed. The leaders of Israel did not want to hear this. Those who are dependent on miracles rarely do.

Conclusion

The widow could provide what Elijah needed: rental space and obscurity. Elijah could provide what she needed: food. She immediately saw the benefit of the transaction. It would last for several years. This arrangement thwarted Ahab's attempt to locate Elijah. It provided a cover.

To enter into this arrangement, she had to take a chance that he was a fraud. "And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me." His proposition began with "fear not." Over the next three and a half years, she learned not to fear. Meanwhile, everyone in Israel was learning what fear is. They faced starvation. She had used the language of starvation rhetorically. Israelites faced starvation literally. God had removed Israel's protection in order to weaken the authority of the king, his evil queen, and the court prophets of Baal. God provided literal protection for a foreign woman and her son. They played an important role in God's confrontation with Israel. They were the beneficiaries of an arrangement that was not for their benefit, but rather for Israel's—specifically, the remnant. God told Elijah after his return, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (I Kings 19:18). By providing cover for Elijah, she and her son acted on their behalf. She never knew this, and neither did they.

22

A STOLEN INHERITANCE

And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.

I KINGS 21:1–3

The theocentric issue here is inheritance.

A. The Jubilee

The Mosaic law established the requirement that the original families of the conquest of Canaan not be allowed to sell rural land on a permanent basis. The laws of the 49th or national jubilee year included a law of landed inheritance (Lev. 25:8–13).[1].

There was no absolute right of private property in rural land. There was only one legal way to transfer land to another family: an obscure law governing an unfulfilled vow to a priest (Lev. 27:20–21).[2] Naboth was not allowed to sell the land to Ahab on a permanent basis. He did have the right to lease it to Ahab until the jubilee year. There is no record that the jubilee law was ever honored in Israel. Ahab assumed that Naboth would sell the land to him at some price. He was mistaken. Naboth refused to sell. Without the jubilee law to protect his heirs' inheritance, the only way to secure his inheritance was to refuse to sell.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 29.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 36.

B. Property Rights

Ahab was depressed by the fact that he could not persuade Naboth to sell his land.

> And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard (I Kings 21:4–6).

His wife devised a scheme to enable her husband to obtain the land. She paid two men to bring false witness against him for blasphemy against God and the king. "And there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones, that he died" (I Kings 21:13).

What was blasphemy? In almost every case in the Bible, the Hebrew word translated here as "blaspheme" is translated as "bless." The exceptions are in this chapter and in the Book of Job. There, it is translated as "curse" (Job 1:5; 2:5, 9). This was a capital crime. "And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death" (Lev. 24:16).

The congregation stoned Naboth for this act. "And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead" (I Kings 21:15). Why would he get the land? There was no valid reason. The witnesses had said that Naboth blasphemed the king, too. He was the injured party. He was entitled to restitution. Naboth's death was that restitution. He was not entitled to the inheritance. That belonged to Naboth's heirs.

C. Confrontation

His wife told him to go to the field and take possession of it. Simultaneously, God told Elijah to go to the field to confront the king.

> Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine (I Kings 21:18–19).

Ahab and Elijah did what they were told. They met in the field. "And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD" (I Kings 21:20). Then Elijah cursed Ahab, as just Naboth was accused of having done to Ahab. The curse was the disinheritance of Ahab. "And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin" (I Kings 21:22). He also cursed his wife. "And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (v. 23).

The prophet had the authority to place these curses on the enemies of God. The penalty for false witness is the penalty that was imposed on the victim.

> And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deut 19:18–21).[3]

God served as the judge of Ahab and his wife.

Conclusion

Ahab coveted another man's inheritance. His wife arranged for him to inherit it. This required funding a conspiracy to commit perjury. The penalty for this false testimony was death. Ahab had sought to inherit what would have belonged to Naboth's heirs. His penalty was death

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 45.

on the battlefield and the disinheritance of his heirs. Her penalty was a cursed death: to be eaten by dogs.

23

LYING SPIRITS

And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee.

I KINGS 22:20–23

The theocentric principle here is that when God wants to bring negative sanctions against a covenant-breaker, He will see to it that the person chooses a self-destructive course of action.

Ahab had been granted peace because he had humbled himself before God and Elijah regarding his theft of Naboth's land. God promised that He would not destroy Ahab. "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house" (I Kings 21:29). But this promise was conditional. We know this because in the next section, God lures Ahab into a suicidal war against Syria.

There is nothing in the text that indicates that Ahab returned the land to Naboth's heirs. He did not make restitution, as required by the Mosaic law: "If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep" (Ex. 22:1).[1] The sheep was dead: Naboth. Ahab owed at least four times the value of the property to the heirs.

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 43.

A. Prophesies: Lying and Truthful

God gave Ahab peace with Syria for three years (I Kings 22:1). Then the king of Judah paid a visit. Ahab asked him if he was willing to start a war with Syria to get back the city of Ramoth (v. 4). He spoke of this city as "ours," but it was Ahab's (v. 3). It was not in Judah. The king of Judah unwisely agreed (v. 4). But there was a condition. He wanted Ahab to consult his prophets (v. 5). These were court prophets, funded by Ahab. They assured Ahab that he would be victorious (v. 6). Jehosaphat was not convinced. He asked for a second opinion (v. 7). Ahab said that Micaiah was available, but that he always prophesied bad outcomes for Ahab (v. 8). That was the prophet who Jehosaphat wanted to consult (v. 8). So, Ahab sent for him (v. 9). Meanwhile, the court prophets reassured the two kings that victory over Syria was there for the taking (vv. 11–12).

Micaiah arrived. "So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king" (v. 15). Ahab recognized insincerity when he heard it. This was out of character for Micaiah. "And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?" (v. 17). He knew the difference between a paid court prophet and a real one. Micaiah then told him the truth. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace" (v. 17). This image was clear: Ahab would be killed in battle. "And the king of Israel said unto Jehosaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?" (v. 18). Then Micaiah told him what else he had seen. "Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left" (v. 19). Then he revealed the story of God's desire to locate a lying spirit to deceive Ahab's court prophets.

The enraged one of the court prophets. "But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee?" (v. 24). Micaiah told him that in the day of Ahab's death, Zedekiah would hide himself in the inner chamber (v. 25). At that point, Ahab ordered Micaiah imprisoned (vv. 26–27). Micaiah responded that if Ahab returned in peace from the battle, God had not spoken through Micaiah (v. 28).

The kings then went into battle (v. 29). Ahab knew he was at risk. He told Jehosaphat to wear kingly robes. Ahab, on the other hand, would disguise himself (v. 30). At this point, Jehosaphat should have said, "Let's both wear robes." As it turned out, the disguise did Ahab no good, and the robes did Jehosaphat no harm.

> But the king of Syria commanded his thirty and two captains that had rule over his chariots, saying, Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely it is the king of Israel. And they turned aside to fight against him: and Jehoshaphat cried out. And it came to pass, when the captains of the chariots perceived that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him (vv. 31–33).

At that point, God intervened.

> And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day: and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot (vv. 34–35).

The Hebrew word translated here as "at venture" means "simply." In the context, it means "at random." The man did not recognize that Ahab was the king. He just shot an arrow randomly. It reached its preordained target. Micaiah's prophesy came true.

B. Untrustworthy Prophets

The court prophets thought they were providing accurate information. Zedekiah's reaction to Micaiah's description of what God had done to deceive the prophets indicates that he did not believe Micaiah's story.

King Jehosaphat did not fully trust the prophets. He wanted verification. Micaiah said that the court prophets had been deceived by a lying spirit. That spirit had been authorized by God to deceive the prophets. Why? To deceive Ahab. The covenant-breaker should not trust in prophets, Ezekiel warned.

> For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I the LORD will answer him by myself: And I will set my face against that man, and will make

> him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him; That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 14:7–11).

There is covenantal cause and effect in history. He who breaks covenant with God should not expect guidance when he most needs it. He is vulnerable to deception by God and by those who claim to speak on behalf of God. This will continue until the end of time, Paul wrote.

> And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (II Thes. 2:8–12).

Conclusion

King Ahab was a marked man—marked by God. He might have avoided death on the battlefield. He could have made restitution to Naboth's heirs. He refused. He could have let well enough alone with Syria. He refused. He could have listened to Micaiah. He refused. He thought he could reduce his risk on the battlefield by disguising himself. He was wrong. God lured him into a trap. Lying spirits lie. Covenant-breaking people believe. Power and signs and wonders are not guarantees of reliability.

24

LABOR AS DEBT COLLATERAL

Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

II KINGS 4:1

The theocentric principle is hierarchy: service to God is preferable to service to creditors. "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov. 22:7).[1]

A. Collateralized Debt

The widow of a prophet's son faced a crisis. He had gone into debt. He had died. The family still owed the debt. The creditor was coming to take the sons into service.

Why did the creditor have a legal claim on the labor of the sons? Because they were not yet of age to join God's holy army: age 20 (Ex. 30:14).[2] They were subordinates in their father's household. He could have benefited from their labor; hence, they were capital assets. The creditor had a legal claim on their labor services until they reached the age of maturity or until the sabbatical year released them because the debt was automatically canceled. "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is

1. Gary North, *Wisdom and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Proverbs* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2007] 2012), ch. 66.

2. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 58.

called the Lord's release" (Deut. 15:1–2).[3] But the year of release was associated with the sabbatical year of rest for the land. "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard" (Lev. 25:3–4).[4] The problem was, the courts did not enforce the land's rest. Also, the people sold into servitude for debt repayment were not released, as required. This is why God sent Judah into captivity. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah were oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the Lord of hosts is his name: he shall thoroughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 50:33–34). So, the sons would not go free until they reached age 20. The widow would not have their support.

B. Conventional Steps in a Miracle

First, Elisha conducted an inventory. He asked her what assets she owned. A pot of oil was all (v. 2). He then told her to go to people in the neighborhood and collect empty jars. Her good reputation was an asset. She had not considered this. He told her to close the doors and, in the presence of her sons, pour oil from her jar into the containers. She did. When she poured out the oil, it kept pouring until every container was filled. This was a miracle comparable to the one that fed the widow, her son, and Elijah in Zerephath.[5] "Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest" (v. 7).

In assessing the economic aspects of this miracle, we must understand Elisha's method of analysis. First, Elisha recognized that the debt had to be paid. Second, he assessed the nature of her assets: oil and a good reputation. Third, he recognized that there was a ready market for oil. She could obtain money to pay the creditor on short notice. There would be money left over for purchasing household necessities.

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3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

4. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 23.

5. Chapter 21.

The miracle relied on the woman's ability to borrow containers. There had to be some sense of neighborliness. Neighbors had to be willing to lend her capital assets for free. She had no spare cash. She could not rent containers. Had she not had a good reputation, she would not have been able to obtain that many containers on short notice. The miracle's effectiveness therefore rested on ethics: hers and her neighbors'.

Conclusion

A godly man had gone into debt. This was probably not a commercial debt, although it may have been. It was probably an emergency debt. It was governed by the law of charitable loans (Deut. 15:1–7). The collateral was a man's labor. This included the labor of minor sons.

The year of release was not honored in Israel or Judah. So, the sons might be in bondage until they reached adulthood. Elisha recognized that these sons were their mother's comfort. He provided a miracle, which they performed in private. This solved their problem.

25

RECIPROCAL ACTS OF GRACE

And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

II KINGS 4:8–10

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer.

A. Grace vs. Reciprocity

This family could afford to add a room to their house in order to serve as an occasional guest room for Elisha. This would be wasted space most of the time. There would be no rental income from it. Because they never knew when he would pass by, they would have to leave it empty.

This was a gesture of support for Elisha. He responded by offering a far greater gesture of support. He asked his servant what the woman wanted in life. The servant said she had no child. Elisha had the servant call her, so that he could speak to her. This indicated that he was in a position to grant her this blessing. He did not ask her what she wanted. He announced that she would give birth (vv. 11–16). This was fulfilled the next year (v. 17). This was analogous to Abraham's visit from God, who granted Sarai the same gift, in response to Abraham's generosity in providing a free meal and lodging (Gen. 18:18).

This led to another miracle. The child later had a stroke and died. Elisha raised him from the dead, even as Elijah had raised the son of

the widow (vv. 19–37). This was the supreme mark of a prophet. Jesus possessed the same ability. He raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:44).

In two instances, Elisha demonstrated his ability to perform miracles. The opportunity had come because the woman had the idea of providing free lodging for Elisha and then followed through on it. She had asked for nothing in return. She just wanted to make his work less expensive.

Her generosity did not establish a quid pro quo. She had no economic claim on him. *He responded in grace to an act of grace.* This led to a pair of blessings that she could not have purchased with money.

The woman initiated the idea. Her husband went along with her. This looked as though it would be a net economic loss. They had enough wealth so that it was not a major financial burden. It was a little chamber. It led to a large blessing.

What the woman had done to Elisha was imitated by another faithful adherent. A man gave Elisha a lot of food for one man to eat. "And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof" (II Kings 4:42). Elisha's response was to share this with people in the neighborhood. "And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat. And his servitor said, What, should I set this before an hundred men? He said again, Give the people, that they may eat: for thus saith the LORD, They shall eat, and shall leave thereof. So he set it before them, and they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the LORD" (vv. 43–44). This was the historical background of Jesus' feeding of thousands of people on two occasions (Matt. 14:15–21; 15:30–38). The ability to multiply food was a mark of a prophet. Elisha was the type. Jesus was the archetype.

The text does not indicate that the man who gave Elisha the food was the recipient of any blessing from Elisha.

B. Blessings Are Not for Sale

Naaman was a great general for Syria. He contracted leprosy. In his household was a captive Israelite girl. The girl showed mercy to Naaman. "And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (II Kings 5:3). This became an opportunity to provide a witness for God to a pagan official.

The story got to Naaman. He, in turn, went to the king of Syria.

He knew that he could not submit himself to a foreign prophet apart from the blessing of his king. He did not violate authority. The king, in turn, dealt with the king of Israel. He did not violate what he regarded as Israel's hierarchy of authority. "And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment" (II Kings 5:5). Naaman was clearly a crucial asset for the king of Syria.

The king of Syria sent Naaman with the gold and a letter of introduction to the king of Israel. The king of Israel thought it was some sort of deception. "And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me" (II Kings 5:7). The letter must not have mentioned the prophet. The king of Syria regarded this power as inheriting in the person of Israel's king, as an agent of God.

Elisha knew of the king's rending of his clothes and came to him to inquire the reason. When told, he instructed the king to send Naaman to his house. "So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (II Kings 5:9–10). Elisha dealt with Naaman as a subordinate. He did not meet with him directly. He was testing Naaman's submission. Naaman failed the test.

> But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage (II Kings 5:11–12).

He would not have been healed, but for the intervention of his subordinates. "And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" (II Kings 5:13). So, Naaman humbled himself and bathed in the Jordan. He was instantly cured. "And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all

earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused" (II Kings 5:15–16). Here, he humbled himself. This was appropriate. He offered to pay the prophet as a token of submission. Elisha refused. He was not in need of any gift. So, Naaman asked for another blessing.

> And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD. In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing (II Kings 5:17–18).

Naaman wanted dirt from Israel as a mark of his subordination to Israel's God. As a commander, he was required to accompany his king into the worship place for the regional god. Naaman wanted to carry a token of Israel back to Syria as a covenantal mark of his subordination to the God who had healed him. He did not ask to be circumcised. He did ask for God's forgiveness for mandatory acts of piety to a god he no longer believed in. Elisha granted him this request. "And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way" (II Kings 5:19).

The king of Syria thought he could pay the king of Israel for healing. Naaman thought he could do some great thing to gain healing. Naaman's servants told him to do the small thing that the prophet had told him to do. They saw that what was required was subordination to something anyone could do, not proof of his own ability to meet the requirement.

God's grace is not for sale. Any performance required is not a purchase. It is a token of subordination.

C. A Servant's Error

Naaman's servants understood what needed to be done: ritual subordination, not a purchase. Elisha's servant did not understand this. He decided to take advantage of the situation. He pursued Naaman and asked for payment. "And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be

content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him" (II Kings 5:22–23). For Naaman, this was a minimal payment. He was glad to offer twice as much. It made him feel as though he was being of some use to Elisha's ministry. That, Elisha had previously denied to him.

Elisha knew what had taken place as soon as he had returned.

> And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow (II Kings 5:26–27).

This was a unique form of leprosy. It marked a man as having been under God's curse, but it did not make him an outcast. Here was the law of leprosy. "Then the priest shall consider: and, behold, if the leprosy have covered all his flesh, he shall pronounce him clean that hath the plague: it is all turned white: he is clean" (Lev. 13:13). Gehazi could still remain a servant, but he would henceforth be a marked man. Leprosy was a judicial disease, not a communicable one.[1] A man was unclean judicially if he had leprosy, but not if he was entirely white. If he was entirely white, he had been under a curse, but he was not dangerous to the community.

Conclusion

There is no indication in the Bible that man can establish a positive balance sheet in history for himself by granting favors, large or small, to God. These acts of generosity are not acts of purchase. God does not offer His services for sale. Neither did the prophets. But God is always in a position to grant people their desires. These acts of grace need not be limited by the conventional operations of nature.

1. Gary North, *Boundaries and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Leviticus*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1994] 2012), ch. 9.

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PROFITING FROM INSIDE INFORMATION

And it came to pass after this, that Ben-hadad king of Syria gathered all his host, and went up, and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.

II KINGS 6:24–25

The theocentric principle here is imputation: point four of the biblical covenant model.[1] Men impute economic value in terms of their scale of values within the context of a specific time period.

A. When Money Fails

Syria besieged Jerusalem. No one from outside the city could bring food to the city. The productivity of the city was economically depressed because of its lack of trade with the rural countryside.

People need to eat. If they do not eat, they die. Eating is high on every person's value scale. But, as they become full, they devote additional wealth to purchasing other items. The greater the supply of food, the lower its cost. This is because people demand other things, once they have accumulated enough food to last for a specific time period. The marginal value of an additional unit of food falls below the marginal value of something else.

The siege changed the context. Food could not be resupplied. It ran low. People were willing to spend their savings of silver to buy food. Their silver would do them no good if they died of starvation.

1. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant*, 2nd ed. (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, [1987] 1992), ch. 4. Gary North, *Unconditional Surrender: God's Program for Victory*, 5th ed. (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2010), ch. 4.

This had happened to Egypt during the seven-year famine. "And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth" (Gen. 47:15).[2]

This does not mean that prices rose. It means that the price of food rose. The prices of other items fell. No one wanted the goods that sold well in times of peace. They would have had to sell these goods at a loss in order to buy silver. If the price of silver in relation to an ass's head fell, then the prices of other nonessentials also fell.

B. Cannibalism

The king of Israel faced a problem. A woman approached him. She asked for help. He told her that he could not help her. He had no food (v. 26). But that was not her problem. She had a contractual difficulty. She needed a government official to enforce it.

> And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to day, and we will eat my son to morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him: and I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him: and she hath hid her son. And it came to pass, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he rent his clothes; and he passed by upon the wall, and the people looked, and, behold, he had sackcloth within upon his flesh (vv. 28–30).

This was the fulfillment of a prophecy given by God to Moses.

> The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein thou trustedst, throughout all thy land: and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee: So that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of

2. Gary North, *Sovereignty and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Genesis* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1982] 2012), ch. 33.

> his children which he shall leave: So that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat: because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee in all thy gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not adventure to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil toward the husband of her bosom, and toward her son, and toward her daughter, And toward her young one that cometh out from between her feet, and toward her children which she shall bear: for she shall eat them for want of all things secretly in the siege and straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in thy gates (Deut. 28:49–57).

What was the king's response? To blame Elisha. "Then he said, God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day" (v. 31).

C. Prices as Indicators of Supply and Demand

Elisha was not concerned. He had inside information. God had revealed the future to him. "Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (II Kings 7:1). He did not say how this would come about. Instead, he focused on the array of prices. There would be a radical shift in favor of holding silver rather than food.

One ruler was skeptical. He voiced his skepticism. Elisha responded by predicting the man's death. "Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof" (v. 2).

Four lepers sat at the gate. They made a cost-benefit analysis: ". . . they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die?" (v. 3b).

> If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die (v. 4).

Then they took action in terms of their cost-benefit analysis. "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there" (v. 5). God had scared away the army by the sound of an approaching army. They had all fled, leaving their

food and money behind (vv. 6–7). "And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it" (v. 8).

They satisfied their highest priorities first. They ate and drank. Next, they confiscated spoils: silver, gold, and clothing. They hid this booty. Then, having worked their way down their individual scales of values, conscience struck them. "Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household" (v. 9). They feared God, who brings negative sanctions. Their brethren were starving. "So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were" (v. 10).

This information was carried to the king (v. 11). He suspected a trap. The Syrians were hiding, waiting to attack any who came out of the city for food (v. 12). So, he sent out a few men on the five remaining horses to investigate. This testified to his own lawless heart. Moses had been clear about kings with horses and chariots. "But he shall not multiply horses to himself (Deut. 17:16a). Yet he had blamed Elisha for his troubles. The scouts found that the Syrians had fled.

The residents wanted to get to the food. "And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord" (v. 16). Elisha's prediction had come true. But one man missed the feast: the skeptic. "And the king appointed the lord on whose hand he leaned to have the charge of the gate: and the people trode upon him in the gate, and he died, as the man of God had said, who spake when the king came down to him" (v. 17). The text repeats this as a double witness (vv. 19–20).

The prophet had possessed accurate information about the future. God had given it to him. Anyone who trusted him and who had food to sell would have sold it for silver immediately. This way, they would have sold assets that were about to fall in price. If his listeners had believed him, a move toward the array of prices that he predicted for the next day would have begun to appear soon after he made the forecast. Those with food would have sold it, driving down the price

of food. But they did not hear it, and those who did hear it did not believe it. One man was so skeptical that it cost him his life.

D. Famine Was Coming

The siege was over. A famine was coming, one comparable in length to the one that struck down Egypt in Joseph's day. "Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise, and go thou and thine household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the LORD hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years" (II Kings 8:1). She believed him. She and her family moved to Philistia. There is no indication that he told anyone else. The entire nation did not move. The entire nation suffered the famine.

When the seven years were over, she and her family returned. She was ready to re-claim her land. But squatters had occupied it. So, she went to the king. At that very moment, Elisha's servant Gehazi was talking to the king. He was still leprous, but pure white. He was ritually clean. He could lawfully interact with anyone inside the gates of a city. The king had asked Gehazi about Elisha's works. This king was now a believer in Elisha's power. Gehazi told him of the restoration to life of her son. At that moment, the woman gained access to their presence. The king asked her what she wanted. She wanted back her land. The king then ordered his officer to restore her land and whatever had been taken from it over the past seven years (v. 6).

Conclusion

The residents of Israel's capital city did not believe Elisha in the time of the siege. He proved to be accurate. Prior to the next famine, a woman and her family did believe him. He again proved to be accurate. Those who had used her abandoned land to grow food during the famine had to repay her. She was far better off at the end of the famine than she would have been, had she stayed in Israel.

He had inside information. He knew what the prices of goods would be the next day. Those who listened to his predictions and took appropriate action prospered. Those who ignored him didn't.

27

PUBLIC INTEREST VS. SELF-INTEREST

> *And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the dedicated things that is brought into the house of the* Lord*, even the money of every one that passeth the account, the money that every man is set at, and all the money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the* Lord*, Let the priests take it to them, every man of his acquaintance: and let them repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house.*
>
> II KINGS 12:4–6

The theocentric principle here is that the worship of God is more important than other uses of money donated to the church.

A. Bureaucratic Priests

The king was a righteous man. "And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him" (v. 2). Jehoiada was still in charge of the temple. Despite the fact that the dual structures of authority, church and state, were unified in their instructions, the priests did not follow orders.

The king grew tired of waiting for the priests to follow his orders and repair the temple. He decided to put on more pressure. He forbade any more collections by the priests until the temple was fixed. "Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and the other priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore receive no more money of your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house" (v. 17). The account in Second Chronicles has his words even more emphatic. "And the king called for Jehoiada the chief, and said unto him, Why hast thou not required of the Levites to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem

the collection, according to the commandment of Moses the servant of the Lord, and of the congregation of Israel, for the tabernacle of witness?" (II Chron. 24:6). There was a reason for the condition of the temple. "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim" (II Chron. 24:7).

The priests, being good bureaucrats, had fully understood this problem. But they had done nothing to solve it. "And the priests consented to receive no more money of the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house" (v. 18). Now they were required to take action.

> But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord: and the priests that kept the door put therein all the money that was brought into the house of the Lord. And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags, and told the money that was found in the house of the Lord (II Kings 12:9–10).

Chronicles adds this:

> And at the king's commandment they made a chest, and set it without at the gate of the house of the Lord. And they made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in to the Lord the collection that Moses the servant of God laid upon Israel in the wilderness. And all the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end (II Chron. 24:8–10).

This went on for some time.

> Now it came to pass, that at what time the chest was brought unto the king's office by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the high priest's officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to his place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance (II Chron. 24:11).

The king had threatened no sanctions against the priests. This was not coercion. He waited 23 years (v. 6) before again suggesting strongly that the priests repair the temple. The priests were in effect stealing from God and also the people. Then the king gave money to get the work done (II Kings 12:11). This also was not coercion. Judah was not a state-run theocracy.

B. Delegation Without Monitoring

This was a joint operation. "And the king and Jehoiada gave it to such as did the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and hired masons and carpenters to repair the house of the Lord, and also such as wrought iron and brass to mend the house of the Lord" (II Chron. 24:12; cf. II Kings 12:11–12).

These men did not do the more detailed work of the temple's implements. "Howbeit there were not made for the house of the Lord bowls of silver, snuffers, basons, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of the Lord: But they gave that to the workmen, and repaired therewith the house of the Lord" (II Kings 12:13–14). The workmen returned the leftover money. This money was then used to hire specialists. "And when they had finished it, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada, whereof were made vessels for the house of the Lord, even vessels to minister, and to offer withal, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the Lord continually all the days of Jehoiada" (II Chron. 24:14).

The craftsmen had done a good job. They did it under budget. The priests did not monitor them. "Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully" (II Kings 12:15).

The golden implements did not remain in the temple for long. "Then Hazael king of Syria went up, and fought against Gath, and took it: and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem" (v. 17). King Joash then used the sacred implements of the temple to bribe Hazael. "And Jehoash king of Judah took all the hallowed things that Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own hallowed things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the Lord, and in the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria: and he went away from Jerusalem" (v. 18).

The author passed over the rest of the king's career. He referred to a missing book: "And the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?" (v. 19). We are told only how the king died. "And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Millo, which goeth down to Silla" (v. 20).

C. God Imposes Negative Sanctions

Second Chronicles reveals why this assassination took place. Joash and the princes of Judah had rebelled against God.

> Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the LORD God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass. Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear.
>
> And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, The LORD look upon it, and require it.
>
> And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the LORD delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash. And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and slew him on his bed, and he died: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings (II Chron. 24:17–25).

D. Sanctions and Bureaucracies

The decline into sin began with the priesthood. These men for years used money brought to the temple by the people to fund projects other than the repair of God's house. The king recognized that this was wrong. It placed the nation in jeopardy. God might bring negative sanctions against Judah. So, he ordered the priests to repair God's house. It had taken years for the king to recognize what was going on. This is indicative of how every bureaucracy works. If there are no negative sanctions threatening them, bureaucrats will continue to pursue their own agenda at the expense of the public.

Jehoiada had instigated the rebellion of the priests against the king. After his death at the ripe old age of 130 (II Chron. 24:15), the

princes conspired against the priesthood by setting up rival places of worship. The king assented to this. When Jehoiada's son dared to criticize the princes, they killed him. The king did not bring negative sanctions against them. God therefore held him accountable. God brought negative sanctions against the nation. A small group of Syrians conquered a large army of Judah. Then the king's subordinates murdered him.

Step by step, the rulers of Judah—princes and priests—looked after their own interests. They did not look after God's interests. They had been raised up by God to serve as his ministers. Instead, they used their monopolistic positions to pursue their own interests at the expense of God's interests.

Conclusion

This passage does not tell us what the priests did with the money they held back from temple repairs. They deferred maintenance until the deterioration was visible to the king. They short-changed God. Then God short-changed them. He did so by bringing the Syrians against them. He allowed the king to strip the temple of its gold and silver. God cared about ethics more than gold and silver. He cared more about imposing negative sanctions on rebellious servants than he did about the adornment of His temple.

People pursue their own interests when they are granted monopolistic authority to pursue the public's interest. Beginning in the 1960s, a group of economists called public choice economists began to develop theories of how government employees work. People work for agencies that were set up to protect the public interest. The members nevertheless pursue their own economic self-interest, just as individuals do in non-governmental agencies. By assuming that employees pursue their own interests at the expense of the public's interest, in whose name they act, economists make better predictions about how government agencies operate than if they assume that the employees pursue the public's interest.

28

LOW-KEY LIVING

At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

II KINGS 20:12–13

The theocentric principle here is to avoid tempting the enemies of God by making yourself a target. It places God's kingdom at risk.

A. Putting God's Possessions at Risk

Hezekiah unwisely displayed to foreign dignitaries the wealth in God's temple.

> Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (II Kings 20:14–18).

This took place sometime around 703 B.C. We know this because he died in 687 B.C. Isaiah had just announced that the king would

receive 15 additional years of life (v. 6). The Babylonians did not carry off the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to Babylon until approximately 586 B.C. So, this was a long-term prophecy. When Isaiah spoke of the king's sons, he meant distant heirs.

What had Hezekiah done wrong? Possibly nothing. Isaiah used the incident to introduce Hezekiah to a distant future. In Hezekiah's day, Assyria was the great empire (II Kings 19). Babylon was not yet the dominant kingdom. Yet Isaiah announced that Babylon would carry off Judah's population and the treasures of Jerusalem, including the temple's treasures. The news did not bother Hezekiah. "Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?" (v. 19). The announcement confirmed that none of this was likely to happen in his lifetime or the lifetimes of his near heirs. He had just received a 15-year stay of execution. This was stay of Judah's execution.

B. Tribute Money

Why did Isaiah approach the king immediately after this incident? He could have announced this when he announced that the king would live another 15 years. The warning was in fact a stay of execution for Judah. But he did not give it until after the visit from the representatives of Babylon.

The representatives saw the great wealth of the king and the temple. Yet twice in recent history, Judah's kings had stripped all of this wealth to pay tribute money to Assyria (II Kings 6:8; 18:14–15). The Babylonians would have known this. Advertising Assyria's successes in suppressing other cities was part of Assyria's system of regional control. Yet these two incidents were not the first time that the treasures of the king and the temple had been used to pay tribute. Syria had been a previous beneficiary (II Kings 12:18). So had the northern kingdom of Samaria (II Kings 14:14). This indicates that the productivity of the people of Judah was considerable. Their taxes and gifts to the temple had replaced what had been lost each time.

Any regional king would have known about the temple's wealth. Hezekiah made sure that the Babylonians knew. What was the point? Was it to proclaim the sovereignty of God? That sovereignty was not represented by the recently assembled gold in the temple. Temple gold had been used too often to pay tribute. If anything, this gold testified to the non-sovereignty of God. That was the opinion of the Assyrians. The king's agent had sent this message to Hezekiah. "Behold,

thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed; as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezeph, and the children of Eden which were in Thelasar?" (II Kings 19:11–12). That led the king into a trap. Hezekiah prayed to God, and God decided to uphold His honor.

> Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead (II Kings 19:32–37).

God did not intervene in order to save the gold in the temple. He intervened because He did not tolerate being compared with the defeated gods of regional city-states. Any would-be empire-builder would have lusted after the gold of the temple. The reports brought back to the king of Babylon by his representatives would have whetted his appetite.

Conclusion

Hezekiah would have been wise to be polite to the representatives of Babylon, but not given them the grand tour. "Look at all this" was not the kind of welcome a wise king would ever give in that region of the world. Better would have been this: "It could be worse. Now, I want to show you my fig orchard."

> And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon (I Kings 4:25).

> But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it (Micah 4:4).

> In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree (Zech. 3:10).

29

RECEIPTS AND ACCOUNTING

> *Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the silver which is brought into the house of the* Lord*, which the keepers of the door have gathered of the people: And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the* Lord*: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the* Lord*, to repair the breaches of the house, Unto carpenters, and builders, and masons, and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house. Howbeit there was no reckoning made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand, because they dealt faithfully.*
>
> II KINGS 22:4–7

The theocentric principle here is the fear of God. Where it is absent, men need receipts.

A. Independent Contractors

The young king, Josiah, ordered the high priest to begin repair work on the temple. This indicates a breakdown of responsibility within the priesthood. Why had the temple deteriorated to this extent, so that a teenage king could notice it? This is another example of the discrepancy between public goods and individual self-interest.[1]

The high priest obeyed the king. He hired skilled craftsmen to perform the repair work. The high priest had been ordered to pay for this with money collected at the door of the temple. The high priest did not require the workmen to provide financial accounts of what they had spent. They did the work faithfully.

This indicates that the craftsmen were not part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were independent contractors. The high priest did

1. Chapter 27.

not require them to provide an accounting. It was not his responsibility to monitor how they ran their businesses. He hired the contractors to do the work.

The text does not say that they competed by placing initial bids on the jobs, but the absence of receipts points to this. Why? Because the high priest needed to give an account to the king. He had been ordered to do something specific: repair the temple with money collected at the temple's door. He was under authority. He needed to prove that he had complied. He also needed to show that he was not favoring cronies or relatives with jobs paid for by temple funds. The only way to do this would have been to open the bidding process to the public.

He did not need to get an accounting from the craftsmen with respect to how they spent the money. He needed only to receive receipts for money received by them from the priesthood. The quality of their work would testify to their faithfulness. The text indicates that they met the required standards.

It is the job of the independent contractor to decide what price he will pay for the materials and labor required to perform a task. He evaluates supply and demand. He calculates a profit margin. He is a specialist in such matters. The person who hires him is not. The person hiring him defers authority with respect to where to buy and how much to pay. He only agrees to pay for services rendered. It is of no importance to him how much money the craftsman will make or lose in meeting the contract. This information is outside the buyer's zone of responsibility.

The independent contractor possesses specialized information about the markets for materials and labor. This is his business. He prospers or fails in terms of his ability to keeps costs below revenues. He has a direct self-interest to forecast accurately what costs will be. With respect to this information, the buyer has no legitimate reason to know how he assessed the market and delivered the final product. The buyer has only three areas of responsibility: to sign the initial contract, to evaluate the work, and to pay whatever the contract specifies upon completion of the work.

In the case of the repair of the temple, we are told that the workers "dealt faithfully." This had to do with the finished work. They did what they said they would do. They did it on schedule. They did it for the prices agreed to.

B. Salaried Contractors

The other model is for the hiring firm to place the craftsmen on the payroll. Here, the requirements change completely. The workers must not be evaluated merely in terms of the quality of work performed. They must do it on budget. They report to their superiors regarding what their work is costing. The employer is responsible for the cost of operations. Why? Because he did not open the production process to competitive bidding.

When an employer in-sources a job instead of outsourcing it, he has reasons. It is easier to monitor performance along the way. He does not need to hire a lawyer to sue for damages for work performed in a substandard way. He has hire and fire authority over the workers. There is tighter control. Part of this control is having access to receipts for materials and labor hired by the contractors. The costs of monitoring performance are higher. The hoped-for goal is lower cost. But this is more difficult to assess without extensive outsourcing. It is difficult to assess true cost, i.e., the price of this service in the open market. Without a free market for these services, employers are flying blind.

This is a variation of Ludwig von Mises' argument in 1920 that without private capital markets, central planners cannot evaluate economic cost rationally[2]. Murray Rothbard extended this insight to apply to cartels. There will never be a single cartel, for it would not be able to assess costs of production without legally independent resource markets. It would be irrational.[3]

Conclusion

The high priest did not have to demand an accounting from the contract laborers, because they were independent contractors. They made the decisions regarding how to meet their contracts profitably. That was none of the high priest's business. All he had to do was to receive a receipt for payment upon completion of the work. He had to follow the money from the temple's door to the repairs. He did not have to follow any further.

2. Ludwig von Mises, "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (1920).

3. Murray N. Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: A Treatise on Economic Principles*, 2nd ed. (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, [1962] 2009), pp. 659–61.

30

HOLY DECORATION

Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal: The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and for all manner of work to be made by the hands of artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD? Then the chief of the fathers and princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains of thousands and of hundreds, with the rulers of the king's work, offered willingly, And gave for the service of the house of God of gold five thousand talents and ten thousand drams, and of silver ten thousand talents, and of brass eighteen thousand talents, and one hundred thousand talents of iron. And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the LORD, by the hand of Jehiel the Gershonite. Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD: and David the king also rejoiced with great joy.

I CHRONICLES 29:3–9

The theocentric principle here is the legitimacy of sacrifice to honor God.

A. Celebrating God's Majesty

David here enumerates all the treasure that he had accumulated to build the temple. The wealth was enormous. Then the people added far more.

This indicates that God wanted something magnificent to honor him. The temple under Solomon was spectacular. It contained all of this, plus whatever he added.

One of the cries throughout history has been "God wants this money for the poor." It echoes Judas' complaint.

> Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? (John 12:3–5)

Judas had an ulterior motive. "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (v. 6). The critics of cathedrals have not had ulterior motives. They have actually believed the slogan.

This text teaches that precious metals and precious stones are appropriate to celebrate God's majesty. To celebrate it in this way, individuals must sacrifice great wealth. This sacrifice, like Mary's, testifies to people's respect for God and their appreciation of what He has done on their behalf.

The poor are always with us. There are always people in the bottom 20% of national income. If we were to refrain from celebrating God's majesty until there are no poor, we would never celebrate God's majesty.

Constructing the temple consumed enormous wealth. It took about 100,000 workers (I Kings 5:13–16) seven years (I Kings 6:38). When completed, Solomon offered sacrifices. "And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord" (I Kings 8:63). All this was expensive.

God had blessed Israel as a nation. The people gave a token payment back to Him. They announced: "We know there is more where that came from." The magnificence of the temple was their testimony of confidence regarding the future.

B. To Give to the Poor

Giving to the poor was a requirement in the Old Covenant. It is required in the New Covenant. Yet there was no suggestion anywhere in Kings or Chronicles that God was displeased with the temple's magnificence. Indeed, He had waited a long time for this public adoration.

> For I have not dwelt in an house since the day that I brought up Israel unto this day; but have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another. Wheresoever I have walked with all Israel, spake I a word to

> any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people, saying, Why have ye not built me an house of cedars? (I Chron. 17:5–6)

God was tired of waiting. Solomon built the temple to please God, not to cheat the poor. The poor did not deserve what David and Solomon and the people lavished on God through the construction of the temple.

The poor have no legal claim on the rich. They do have a moral claim on successful brethren in times of crisis. They are morally entitled to zero-interest charity loans, so long as they are willing to be put into servitude for up to six years, should they default on the loan (Deut. 15:1–7).[1]

There were people in economic need in Solomon's day. They had no moral or legal claim on God. They had no moral or legal claim on the people who funded the temple.

Socialist governments spend money on huge government buildings. Keynesian governments spend money on anything they think will get consumers to spend more money, including compulsory wealth-redistribution programs. Every government in history has spent abnormal amounts of money on favored groups and government buildings. Men honor power. When they refuse to honor God, then they generally honor the state.

Conclusion

Not every synagogue was a temple. Not every church building is a cathedral. But to deny in the name of the poor the right of God's people to honor God by a few great representative displays of wealth is to short-change God.

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

31

PREDICTABLE NATIONAL SANCTIONS

And the Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; But sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. Therefore the Lord stablished the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat presents; and he had riches and honour in abundance.

II CHRONICLES 17:3–5

The theocentric principle here is God as the sanctions-bringer in history. These sanctions are distributed in terms of covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking.

A. Representative Obedience

This account of Jehoshaphat, the son of king Asa of Judah, reveals that the system of corporate sanctions described in Deuteronomy 28 was still in operation in Judah. The king was the representative of the kingdom. As such, his adherence to God's law was reckoned by God as applying to the entire nation. Jehoshaphat did what he could to extend the knowledge of biblical law.

> Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, even to Ben-hail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. And with them he sent Levites, even Shemaiah, and Nethaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people (vv. 7–9).

The result extended across the borders of Judah.

> And the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. Also some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and tribute silver; and the Arabians brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and seven thousand and seven hundred he goats (vv. 10–11).

This was peace. This led to the growth of prosperity inside the nation's borders. "And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles, and cities of store. And he had much business in the cities of Judah: and the men of war, mighty men of valour, were in Jerusalem" (vv. 12–13).

B. A Wicked Alliance

The author records the same account that the author of First Kings did. Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab to attack Syria, on behalf of Ahab, who wanted to regain a city that Syria had captured. Ahab's court prophets prophesied success. Jehoshaphat wanted a second opinion. Ahab called Micaiah. He said that Micaiah had always prophesied negative things for him. This was no exception. But why had the court prophets prophesied success? Micaiah explained why.

> Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD; I saw the LORD sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one spake saying after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out, and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the LORD said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and do even so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil against thee (II Chron. 18:18–22; cf. I Kings 22:20–23).

In the ensuing battle, Ahab was killed. Jehoshaphat was spared.

> And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD. Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God (II Chron. 19:1–3).

C. Righteous Judgment

The king continued to reform the system of civil courts.

> And said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts. Moreover in Jerusalem did Jehoshaphat set of the Levites, and of the priests, and of the chief of the fathers of Israel, for the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies, when they returned to Jerusalem. And he charged them, saying, Thus shall ye do in the fear of the Lord, faithfully, and with a perfect heart. And what cause soever shall come to you of your brethren that dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and judgments, ye shall even warn them that they trespass not against the Lord, and so wrath come upon you, and upon your brethren: this do, and ye shall not trespass (vv. 6–10).

After this, the Moabites came to attack Judah. Jehoshaphat went publicly before God in the temple. He affirmed the sovereignty of God.

> And said, O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? (II Chron. 20:6–7)

The king invoked the promise of the inheritance to bolster his case.

> If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee (vv. 9–12).

The nation stood with the king. "And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children (v. 13). The king represented them.

A prophet came and told him not to fear, not even to attack the invaders. Just stand at a distance and watch.

> And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever (vv. 20–21).

The invaders then went to war against themselves (v. 23). "And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away the spoil of them, they found among them in abundance both riches with the dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away: and they were three days in gathering of the spoil, it was so much" (v. 25).

This brought more peace. "And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about" (vv. 29–30).

D. Another Bad Alliance

The king had not learned his lesson from the alliance with Ahab.

> And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish (vv. 35–37).

The negative sanctions were highly specific. The ships were lost. The alliance came to nothing. These negative sanctions warned the king. There is no indication in the text that he did this again. He died peacefully after a long reign. "Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead" (II Chron. 21:1).

Conclusion

King Jehoshaphat experienced highly specific sanctions, both positive and negative, in response to his actions. On one occasion, the sanction was positive despite evil. He was spared by the king of Syria in the battle that Ahab had lured him into. The positive sanction

showed that God had honored him for his previous covenantal faithfulness. The prophet said, "Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD." What was the wrath? Military defeat. He did this once again, and the losses were specific: the failure of the joint venture with another king of Israel.

Generally, his actions were righteous. Judah experienced the blessings of peace and prosperity as a direct result.

32

A CORRUPT INHERITANCE

And he had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn. Now when Jehoram was risen up to the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel. Jehoram was thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord.

II CHRONICLES 21:2–6

The theocentric principle here is inheritance by confession, not bloodline.

A. Inheritance and Disinheritance

The law of inheritance in Deuteronomy regarding the two wives specified that the firstborn son should inherit a double portion.

> If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his (Deut. 21:15–17).

This was a double portion of the entire inheritance. If a man had a total of five sons, the inheritance would be divided into six portions of equal value. The firstborn son would inherit two portions.[1]

There was an associated law regarding lawless adult sons. They were to inherit nothing.

> If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear (Deut. 21:18–21).

This law mandated execution. A father did not possess this authority. Civil magistrates did. Parents were to bring a public covenant lawsuit against a rebellious son, for the sake of preserving social peace and also the family's good name. Inheritance was not by blood. It was by confession and by conformity to biblical law. The Mosaic law did not allow a lawless son to inherit.[2]

B. Lawless Inheritance

With respect to the sons of Jehoshaphat, their father should have followed the laws of inheritance with his sons. It appears that he did allow his younger sons to inherit. But the supreme inheritance was the kingship. Here, Jehoshaphat honored the principle of the firstborn. This turned out to be a catastrophic mistake. Jehoram killed all of his brothers. Presumably, this was to cut off all possibility that a prophet or a priest would anoint one of them in place of him, just as Zadok had anointed Solomon in the presence of Nathan the prophet (I Kings 1:39).

Jehoram was in a marital covenant with the daughter of Ahab. If his father had paid attention to the actions of this son, he would not have allowed him to inherit the kingship. But the father honored a different principle: the principle of the firstborn son.

Abraham had not honored this principle. Ishmael was the firstborn son, not Isaac. Isaac would have allowed Esau to inherit, but God had

1. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 50.

2. *Ibid.*, ch. 51.

told Rebekah that Jacob would inherit. Jacob was the second-born. Judah in turn inherited the scepter of civil power from Jacob. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10). Yet Judah was the fourth-born son (Gen. 29:35). Reuben was first. Samuel picked David for the kingship, passing over David's older brothers. David picked a younger son to succeed him: Solomon. Solomon was the firstborn of Bathsheba. His firstborn was Amnon (II Sam. 3:2). Amnon was a moral monster who raped his own half-sister and then cast her aside (II Sam. 13). The other sons were passed over, killed, or were rejected by David.

> And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron (II Sam 3:3–5).

There were other sons. "And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David" (II Sam. 5:13). Only later was Solomon born, and his mother had been an adulteress. Yet David selected Solomon to rule. Solomon was by far the best of David's sons for the kingship.

Jehoshaphat ignored these precedents. He chose a covenantal rebel to be the king of Judah. This led to the murder of his other sons. Jehoram was covenantally a man of Israel, not Judah.

The author describes disaster after disaster that fell on Judah under Jehoram. Edom successfully revolted (vv. 8–10). Libnah revolted (v. 10). Elijah wrote to him and placed him under a series of curses. "Behold, with a great plague will the Lord smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day" (vv. 14–15).

> Moreover the Lord stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians: And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons (vv. 16–17).

He was disinherited by God. He died just as Elijah had prophesied (v. 19). "Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign,

and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings" (v. 20). He died despised by the nation.

C. Youngest Sons, Oldest Sons

In reaction against Jehoram, the eldest son of Jehoshaphat, the nation of Judah chose Jehoram's youngest son, Ahaziah, to be king. His mother was Athalia, the daughter of Omri and therefore the sister of Ahab. He was the youngest son, but the oldest surviving son.

> And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead: for the band of men that came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the eldest. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction. He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead: and the Syrians smote Joram (II Chron. 22:1–5).

After he was killed in battle, his mother killed all but one of the surviving sons of Jehoram. "But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah" (v. 10). This included her own grandsons. One infant son of Ahaziah survived, but only because he was concealed by the wife of a priest: Jehoiada. She was a daughter of Ahab and the sister of King Ahaziah, but she was covenantally faithful to God (II Chron. 22:1). The murderous queen reigned until Jehoiada anointed Ahaziah's surviving son at age seven. He then had the usurping queen executed. "And she looked, and, behold, the king stood at his pillar at the entering in, and the princes and the trumpets by the king: and all the people of the land rejoiced, and sounded with trumpets, also the singers with instruments of musick, and such as taught to sing praise. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and said, Treason, Treason" (II Chron. 23:13). This was treason against her, but obedience to God. "Then all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars" (II Chron. 23:17). This was treason against Baal, but obedience to God. God rewarded Jehoiada by giving him a long lifespan: 130 years (II Chron. 24:15).

"Joash was seven years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Zibiah of Beersheba. And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (II Chron. 24:1–2). He had been the youngest son of Ahaziah, and the oldest surviving son.

Birth order did not matter. Covenantal commitment mattered.

Conclusion

Jehoshaphat unwisely used the principle of the firstborn son as his standard for judicial inheritance. He did honor the principle of the double portion with respect to economic inheritance. He did not cut off his younger sons. But Jehoram did. He used the power of the sword to defend his inheritance. God then brought negative sanctions against him that cut off his inheritance. God also undermined Judah's empire by allowing the Edomites to escape from Judah's rule.

The people had not complained when he allowed the high places of rebellious sacrifice to continue (v. 11). They shared in his guilt. They came under God's negative sanctions.

33

SUNK COSTS AND FUTURE COSTS

Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and made them captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, according to the houses of their fathers, throughout all Judah and Benjamin: and he numbered them from twenty years old and above, and found them three hundred thousand choice men, able to go forth to war, that could handle spear and shield. He hired also an hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for an hundred talents of silver.

II CHRONICLES 25:5–6

And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this. Then Amaziah separated them, to wit, the army that was come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again: wherefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in great anger.

II CHRONICLES 25:9–10

The theocentric principle here is God as the source of blessings.

A. The Spoils of War

Amaziah, the son of Joash, was planning for a battle with the city state of Seir (II Chron. 25:11). He numbered the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Because this was in preparation for a holy war, it was legal. He also hired 100,000 troops from the northern kingdom's tribe of Ephraim. He paid them 100 talents of silver.

How much silver was a talent? The common estimation of scholars is 50 shekels to a talent.[1] Let us consider the economic implications

1. "Weights and Measures," *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1375.

of this. What was the military purchasing power of a shekel of silver? Not much. "And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means" (I Kings 10:29).

Amaziah paid 100,000 warriors 5,000 shekels of silver. That is one-20th of a shekel per warrior. Each man accepted one-20th of a shekel to march off to war: pay for food, risk his life, and come home in one piece. This does not compute.

Here is another biblical example.

> And when the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David, Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia, and out of Syria-maachah, and out of Zobah. So they hired thirty and two thousand chariots, and the king of Maachah and his people; who came and pitched before Medeba. And the children of Ammon gathered themselves together from their cities, and came to battle (I Chron. 19:6–7).

The Ammonites rented a skilled charioteer, a chariot, and at least one horse for a little over one-and-a-half shekels per warrior (1,000 × 50 = 50,000 ÷ 32,000). A campaign could take weeks. Who fed these men? Who fed the horses? Who paid for repairs? This also does not compute.

What is missing from the story of Amaziah and the rented Ephraimites? The same thing that is missing from the story of the rented Mesopotamian chariots. This: *the promise of spoils*. To the victor belong the spoils. Warriors risked their lives for spoils. The Bible does not say that in these two cases, there was a promise of sharing in the booty, but the pricing tells us that this had to be the case. When men's lives are on the line, they demand payment.

Amaziah made a small down payment to the men of Ephraim. This was merely a token of his good faith. There was an assumption: they would share in the booty. The text makes no sense on any other assumption.

Then a man of God said not to use them. "But there came a man of God to him, saying, O king, let not the army of Israel go with thee; for the LORD is not with Israel, to wit, with all the children of Ephraim. But if thou wilt go, do it, be strong for the battle: God shall make thee fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down" (II Chron. 25:7–8). This led to Amaziah's question: "And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the

hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" (v. 8). The man of God answered: "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." Amaziah sent the 100,000 troops home with no further payment.

B. He Should Have Paid Them

This enraged the troops. They were being publicly humiliated as unworthy to participate. They were also being denied a share of the booty. They exacted vengeance. "But the soldiers of the army which Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell upon the cities of Judah, from Samaria even unto Beth-horon, and smote three thousand of them, and took much spoil" (v. 13). This refers to 3,000 people. Beth-horon had been a city inside Ephraim (Josh. 16:5). It bordered on Benjamin. It had been a Levitical city, where the family of Kohath had lived (I Chron. 6:66–68). At some point, Benjamin had taken control of the city. It went into the southern kingdom, referred here collectively as Judah. The Ephraimites got revenge on what they regarded as stolen property.

C. Sunk Costs

Amaziah worried about that expenditure. That was silly. The money was gone. There was no way he could get it back from an army of 100,000 armed men. Yet he worried about it.

This is a common mistake in analysis. If the asset is permanently gone, it should play no role in anyone's calculations. Costs are opportunities foregone. Once the money is gone, it is no longer an opportunity. It is therefore no longer a cost. But people usually do not think of past costs as no longer relevant. They want to get even with their past mistakes. They want to be able to tell themselves, "I did not make a mistake. I did not lose that money." But they did, the moment it was legally transferred to new owners. Economists call such costs "sunk costs." They are not really costs. They are past expenditures.

The man of God said not to worry about the money already paid. God could provide another 100 talents of silver. Amaziah had not accurately calculated the cost of sending them home. He did not calculate his true costs, based on the risk of damage that an invading army could do to a defenseless population while Judah's army was fighting Seir. He was worried about a sunk cost. He was not worried about future costs.

The king had not consulted with any man of God before he hired the Ephraimites. He had hired them rashly. When he was told by a man of God that he had made a mistake, he immediately made four more. First, he worried about a sunk cost, which was not in fact a cost. It was a past action that was irreversible. We cannot allocate lost assets. We can only allocate present assets. Second, he failed to consider the effects of his snub of their military honor. Third, he ignored the implicit assumption of the warriors that they would share in the booty. Fourth, he underestimated the risk of retaliatory action on the part of the armed Ephraimites.

Conclusion

Amaziah was foolish. He worried about something that he could not regain: money already paid. He also ignored the reality of the warriors' assumption of sharing in the booty. He ignored their sense of honor. Finally, he ignored a real cost: the threat from an angry army inside Judah's borders. He did not think he was breaking a contract. He did not explain that he was acting on orders from a man of God. The army imposed damages on civilians.

Warfare is a risky endeavor. When you hire mercenaries, you cannot be sure on whose side they will fight. When you bring an armed force inside your borders, you are creating an opportunity for plunder. Amaziah did not consider this when he agreed to hire the Ephraimites.

CONCLUSION TO KINGS AND CHRONICLES

> *Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the* Lord *which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the* Lord *God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the* Lord *arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.*
>
> II CHRONICLES 36:14–17

The theocentric principle here is God as sanctions-bringer.

Solomon built the temple. Almost four centuries later, Nebuchadnezzar sacked it (Ezek. 4:5). He killed men indiscriminately. This was the remedy. This was the final negative sanction that Moses had prophesied. "Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity" (Deut. 28:41).

Moses had also prophesied about a return from captivity.

> And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers

> possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers (Deut. 30:1–5).

This was fulfilled under Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon.

> Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up (II Chron. 36:22–23).

Isaiah had prophesied this almost two centuries earlier.

"That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28).

The books of Kings and Chronicles reveal that God did not gain the attention of the Israelites through the imposition of sanctions, either positive or negative. The positive sanctions reinforced them in their self-confidence, just as they reinforced Solomon in his.[1] The negative sanctions were only rarely attributed by the people to their own rebellion. They believed they deserved the positive sanctions, no matter what. They believed they did not deserve the negative sanctions, no matter what. God escalated the negative sanctions. This did no good. Then he brought Nebuchadnezzar to the gates of Jerusalem. No change. Then Nebuchadnezzar broke down the gates.

> And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem: And he burnt the house of the LORD, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about (II Kings 25:8–10).

That got their attention. But it took 70 more years of reminders.

1. Chapter 19.

INTRODUCTION TO EZRA

In the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, Ezra and Nehemiah are one book. We know this because at the end of each book, the scribes provided a count of the verses. They also provided an identification of the middle verse of the book. This was so that future copyists would know how many verses there were. This practice reduced the possibility of error-filled copies. Copyists burned or cut up their copies if these copies did not conform to these notations. These notations are lacking at the end of Ezra. At the end of Nehemiah, these numbers refer for both books.[1] This fact is not widely known by Christians.

James Jordan says that Ezra was concerned with the holiness of the sanctuary, while Nehemiah was concerned with the holiness of society. Ezra focused on the temple. Nehemiah focused on the city and its wall.[2]

The books have the same outline. First, a foreign king authorizes the reestablishment of God's kingdom (Ezra 1–3;, Neh. 1:1–2:16). Second, there is local opposition. Third, the covenant-keepers are successful in completing the building project (Ezra 4:1–6:15; Neh. 2:17–6:19). Fourth, the completion is marked by an act of covenant renewal. Fifth, there is an immediate fall into sin: marriage with foreigners (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 13:4–31).[3]

Jordan makes the case that Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther deal with the same historical period. He argues that the presence of the name Mordecai in the list of returnees under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2) and again in the list in Nehemiah 7:7 indicates that the time period for these two books was within the lifetime of one man. It was not just Mordecai's name that appears in both lists. Three other names do,

1. James B. Jordan, *Darius, Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus in the Bible, Studies in Biblical Chronology No. 5* (2001), p. 16.

2. *Idem*.

3. *Ibid*., p. 17.

too. This was the Mordecai of Esther 10:3.[4] Furthermore, the names of the priests and Levites who signed the covenant renewal document in Nehemiah's 20th year (Neh. 10:1–8) are similar to the list of names of those who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1–7) in the first year of Cyrus' decree (Neh. 12:12–21).[5]

In Nehemiah, we read the following:

> These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city (Neh. 7:6).

The comparative handful of returnees[6] went back at first to Judah and Jerusalem: the southern kingdom. Those whose forebears had come from cities in the southern kingdom returned there. The others returned to their cities. "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities" (Ezra 2:70).

They did not occupy their families' rural plots. They could not. The Persian king had to deal with immigrants from other nations: Samaritans. They had been brought in by the Babylonians to occupy the nearly empty land. The original land distribution of the conquest generation was not restored. This changed the pattern of rural inheritance. The jubilee law had probably not been enforced. After the return, it could not be enforced. The Jews did not possess the legal authority to dispossess the strangers. Ezekiel had announced this at the time of the captivity.

> So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD (Ezek. 47:21–23).[7]

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4. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 19–23.

6. "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women" (Ezra 2:64–65; cf. Neh. 7:66–67).

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

That was the legal requirement, according to the revised Mosaic law. The returnees did not possess the authority to do this. Most probably dwelt in their home cities. In walled cities, the jubilee inheritance laws never applied.

> And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile (Lev. 25:29–30).

The returnees would intermix geographically with Samaritans, who now lived where their forefathers had lived. They headed initially into cities.

34

TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

EZRA 1:1–4

The theocentric principle here is the centrality of the temple in the life of Israel. It was the residence of God in history. This was understood by a Medo-Persian king.

A. Cyrus

Two centuries earlier, Isaiah had prophesied of Cyrus.

> Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem,

> Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid (Isa. 44:24–28).

This prophecy was about to come true. This prophecy, more than anything else, is why the higher critics of the Bible invented a theory of a second Isaiah, called Deutero-Isaiah, who supposedly wrote the second half of the book after the exile ended. Rationalists and humanists cannot accept the possibility that anyone can know the future with such precision. Such a possibility undermines their concept of cause (before) and effect (after). The central idea of prophecy is foreign to them, namely, that God controls the future.

B. The Funding of the Temple

Cyrus understood that the temple should become the center of worship for Israel. The Jews should pay for the rebuilding of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had torn down. It was not the economic responsibility of other nations within the Medo-Persian empire, the empire that had replaced Babylon's.

He understood that he had a crucial role to play in this. He said that God "hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem." As God's designated and long-prophesied agent, he had the authority to identify who should fund the rebuilding: those who followed the God whose temple it had been and would be once again.

He recognized that not all Jews would return to Israel. "And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem." The Jews who stayed behind had an obligation to fund those who would return and do the work of rebuilding. They all had the same confession of faith:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut. 6:4–9).

They also all relied on the same reprentative sacrificial system, which required the temple.

Cyrus recognized that the Jews were different. They had been removed from their land, yet their God was still at the center of their lives. This was not a local god, unlike other gods of the ancient Near East. This God made claims on the lives of His people, even though most of them would not return to Israel. Those who remained behind were no less Jews. The sacrifices would be offered on their behalf.

This recognition was crucial to the future of the Jews. No matter where they resided, for as long as the temple was in Jerusalem, they would remain a separate nation. They were bound by covenant oath, covenant sign (circumcision), and covenant renewal (Passover). This solidarity survived the destruction of the second temple in 70 A.D.

Cyrus restored the treasures that had been removed from the temple. "Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah" (Ezra 1:7–8). There had been an accounting under Nebuchadzezzar. These account books had been retained by Cyrus. The transition of empires involved the transition of accounting records.

C. The Returnees

The leader was Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2). A total of 42,360 members of the congregation—citizens of the nation—returned to Israel. In addition, there were 7,337 servants, plus 200 singers (vv. 64–65). This was a small group. Some of them were rich.

> And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments (vv. 68–69).

This indicates that those who returned were not economic failures in Babylon. Some had been highly successful. They were willing to pioneer the return to a holy land whose population had been brought in from outside the region. They were not going back for business opportunities. They were going back for the temple's sake.

Conclusion

Cyrus was God's representative civil agent in history. Through his actions, a representative group of Jews returned to Israel and constructed the temple. The temple would serve the dispersed Jews as their representative place of sacrifice. Most of them remained outside Israel.

Cyrus required the Jews to fund the building of the temple. This was not the responsibility of the Medo-Persian state. He returned the stolen treasures of the temple. That was the limit of the state's contribution to the project.

35

SYNCRETISM'S ENVY

> *Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the* Lord *God of Israel; Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the* Lord *God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.*
>
> EZRA 4:1–4

The theocentric principle here is the covenantal oath as the basis of membership in God's church.

A. Syncretism and Rebellion

Syncretism is the mixing of rival religious systems. As we shall see in this passage, syncretism is not acceptable to God.

Those residents of the land of Israel who were not bound by covenant oath to the God of Israel would not be allowed to fund the rebuilding of the temple. They would not share in the costs. They would gain the benefits associated with common grace: partial healing but without redemption.[1] They would not share in the benefits associated with special grace: redemption. It was not possible to obtain a portion of God's covenant special grace apart from covenantal subordination to God. This subordination was marked by an oath-sign: circumcision.

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1. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

These residents were Samaritans. They had been brought into the Promised Land to replace the kidnapped Israelites. They had gained some knowledge of God from their time in the land. So, their representatives insisted, “We seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.”

Their offer to co-fund the temple’s construction was rejected by the leaders of Israel. It was clear to the Israel’s leaders that the commitment of these foreigners was not grounded in God’s covenant with Abraham. They could become members of the nation through confession and circumcision. They were not requesting membership in the covenant. They were requesting co-participation apart from binding covenant oath. Their request was rejected forcefully.

B. Envy in Action

Envy is a highly destructive sin. The envious person seeks to tear down others, despite the fact that tearing down others does not benefit him. The envious person is obsessed with the idea that someone else possesses an advantage that he cannot attain. This difference is an affront to him. He refuses to accept it. He seeks to remove it—not by attaining something else of value for himself but by destroying the advantage possessed by the other person.[2]

1. The Samaritans

The Samaritans’ leaders did not accept rejection by the leaders of Israel. They sought to remove the advantage that the Jews would possess through the temple. Even though the Samaritans did not have to finance any part of the temple, they wanted to prevent its construction.

> Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia (vv. 4–5).

Cyrus sent the Jews to Israel in 538 B.C. The reign of Darius the Great began around 522 B.C., 16 years later. He ruled until 486 B.C. He was the king who invaded Greece. He lost the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.

2. Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, [1966] 1970). Reprinted by the Liberty Fund, 1987.

2. Ahasuerus

"And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem" (v. 6). Who was Ahasuerus? The Apocryphal book, I Esdras, identifies him as Darius. It cites the parallel account of a great banquet (Esther 1:1–3), but instead of naming the king Ahasuerus, as the Book of Esther does, it identifies him as Darius (I Esdras 3:1–3). James Jordan presented a strong case that Ahasuerus was another name for Darius the Great.[3] So did Floyd Nolen Jones.[4] Jordan argued that the names were throne names that expressed the greatness of the king.[5] Furthermore, the list of people who returned with Zerubbabel in Cyrus' first year (Neh. 12:1–9) is similar to the list of covenanting Levites and priests who signed the covenant with Nehemiah after the building of the wall (Neh. 10:1–12). The list of names of the returnees under Ezra includes Mordecai (Ezra 2:2). So does the list in Nehemiah 7:7. Nehemiah's list refers to the era after the wall of Jerusalem had been rebuilt (Neh. 7:1).[6]

In the early days of Ahasuerus, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached against the Jews for not finishing the construction of the temple (Ezra 5:1).

> In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying, Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built (Hag. 1:1–2).

> In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying, The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers (Zech. 1:1–2).

3. Rebuilding

The Jews began rebuilding both the temple (Ezra 4:2) and the broken wall of the city (Neh. 4:6–11). The local governor then demanded to know who had authorized this.

3. James B. Jordan, *Darius, Artaxerxes, and Ahasuerus in the Bible, Studies in Biblical Chronology No. 5* (2001); "Esther: Historical & Chronological Comments (III), *Biblical Chronology Newsletter* (May 1996).

4. Floyd Nolen Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament*, 15th ed. (Green Forest, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, 2005), pp. 201–5.

5. Jordan, *Darius*, ch. 2.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

> At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? (Ezra 5:3–4)

This is the universal initial challenge by every official: "Where is your written authorization?" If there is no official piece of paper, there is no authorization. Here is the bureaucrat's assumption: "That which has not been officially authorized is not permitted." This is the opposite of the rule governing God's kingdom, beginning in the garden of Eden: "That which has not been officially prohibited is authorized."

> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:16–17).

Furthermore, the governor asked, who authorized this project locally? Who claimed such authority? He wanted names. This procedure usually terrifies the targeted victims. Not in this case. "But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter" (Ezra 5:5).

C. Letters from Lawyers

Local Samaritans then wrote Darius a letter. This letter is a fine example of the lawyer's deliberately deceptive special pleading.

1. Making the Case

It raised questions of legality. It asked whether this construction project had been officially authorized. This would create doubt in the minds of senior officials under Darius. Doubt regarding authorization might pressure high officials to halt work on the project until the paperwork was in order.

> Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings (vv. 12–13).

This was guilt by association: the Jews were the heirs of the former residents of the land who had unsuccessfully resisted Nebuchadnezzar. Yet this letter was sent to officials of an empire that had overthrown Babylon. Why would they care if Jews had given trouble to Babylon? The Medo-Persian empire had given Babylon far more trouble. Nevertheless, bureaucrats have the same mentality everywhere and in all eras. They do not like resistance to official orders. They also do not like to see creativity that has not been officially approved.

The letter did not mention the temple. It mentioned only the city's wall. Walls were a mark of sovereignty: a technical means for local residents to increase the cost of law-enforcement by the empire. Walls are defensive. Who could the walls be designed to resist, if not the empire? The letter planted seeds of doubt.

Next, the letter asserted that the inquiry was motivated solely out of loyalty to the king. The Samaritans were loyal members of the imperial system: recipients of the king's money. There was no hidden agenda here. No, indeed; the king's well-being was all that mattered to them.

> Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river (vv. 14–16).

They referred the recipient to old records: records of Israel's rebellion against an earlier empire. These are rebellious people, the letter said. The city's wall could have only one goal: resistance to lawful authority.

The strategy worked. Darius ordered his subordinates to examine the pre-exilic records of the Israelites. These written records had been transferred to the archives of the new empire. They showed that the accusation was accurate. These people had once been powerful, collecting tribute from other nations. They had resisted imperial authority. Darius sent a letter back to the critics.

> And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. There have been mighty kings also

> over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? (vv. 19–22)

That was what the Samaritans wanted to hear. The reconstruction of Jerusalem was halted, by order of the king. "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia" (v. 24). This had been the goal of the Samaritans from the beginning. They were after a universal cessation of construction because this would stop work on the temple.

2. A Counter-Letter

The Jews also knew how to play the lawyer's game. They gave an answer to the governor. The governor summarized their answer in his subsequent letter to Darius. The Jews got right to the point at hand: the issue was the construction of the temple, not the building of the wall. The local officials summarized the Jews' argument in a letter to the king.

> They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?

The local governor assured the king that he and his colleagues had followed to the letter the king's instructions in his letter. They had gone beyond the king's instructions in their quest to enforce his letter—a common practice by bureaucrats down through the ages: going beyond what was mandated from on high. They had asked for the names of the leaders.

The Jewish leaders responded to this inquiry by admitting that they had indeed been a rebellious people, thereby undermining to the Samaritans' tactic. The God of Israel had also been upset with the Jews, so He let them be carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. This shifted the terms of the dispute away from political rebellion to theology. That in turn brought the main topic to the forefront: the construction of the temple. The local officials summarized this verbal exchange.

> We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon (7–12).

The Jewish leaders went beyond the distant history of Babylon, where the Samaritans wanted to confine it, to the more recent history of Medo-Persia. They responded in kind to the governor. "You want names. Have we got names!"

> But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished (13–16).

The Jews had the biggest name of all: Cyrus. He had issued a decree regarding the construction of the temple. They had another name, the name of Cyrus's enforcer, Sheshbazzar. This man came 600 miles with the people to lay the foundation of the temple. *Laying the foundation was a covenantal act*. In this case, it was an act of state. As an agent of the king, this man had participated in the construction of the temple.

The Jews by now knew how to deal with bureaucrats. They hinted ever so obliquely to the problem now facing the local bureaucrats. The local bureaucrats had halted work on the temple. This was risky. This was thwarting the decree of Cyrus: "Even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished." The bureaucrats took the hint.

D. Two Men Called Darius

1. Darius the Mede (Cyrus)

In Medo-Persia, thwarting a decree of the king was a dangerous thing to do. By this time in Darius the Great's reign, the story of Dan-

iel and the lions' den would have been widely known by bureaucrats. The envious religious and political leaders of Medo-Persia had sought to entrap Daniel, who had been a Jew of authority in Babylon's empire. They persuaded the earlier Darius, Darius the Mede (Cyrus),[7] to decree that no one should petition his god for 30 days. "Establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree" (Dan. 6:8b-9). It was a stupid law, but Darius signed it anyway. Daniel had then refused to obey, as the officials knew he would. They brought evidence that he had worshipped the God of Israel. But they laid the verbal groundwork before they presented their evidence. "Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's decree; Hast thou not signed a decree, that every man that shall ask a petition of any God or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not" (Dan. 6:12). They then brought charges against Daniel. The king was trapped.

> Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed (Dan. 6:14–15).

When Daniel survived the ordeal in the lions' den, Darius the Mede (Cyrus) placed the scheming officials and their families in the lions' den. The officials had fully understood the law of the Medes and Persians, but they had not understood the risk.

2. Darius the Great

The local governors of Israel understood the risk. They also understood the way out of their dilemma. They asked the king to look it up. Check the records. Perhaps there is evidence to support the Jews' claim.

> Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a

7. James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall: A Commentary on The Book of Daniel* (Powder Springs, Georgia: American Vision, 2009), ch. 12.

> decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter. Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon (Ezra 5:17–6:1).

Lo and behold, there was an official record. And was it detailed!

> And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expences be given out of the king's house: And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God (Ezra 6:2–5).

That ended the dispute. The Samaritans' legal strategy blew up in their faces. In the lawyers' game of looking it up, the Jews had compelling evidence. The king then compensated for his officials' not having looked things up more carefully. He instructed the local officials in no uncertain terms.

> Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed (6–12).

The recipients of this letter had no doubt about their next steps. "Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shethar-boznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily" (v. 13).

> And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king (14–15).

D. Syncretism vs. Subordination

The Samaritans had asked to be a part of the building of the temple. They wanted co-participation covenantally. They claimed to worship the God of Israel. But they were uncircumcised. They were not willing to come under the Mosaic law. So, their offer was rejected.

In contrast, Cyrus and Darius recognized that the God of Israel possessed enormous power. They respected power. Darius knew that he had unwittingly hindered the building of the temple. He was making restitution. He wrote, "of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered." He wanted to speed up the construction process. He also formally brought sacrifices to the God of Israel: "young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." He was subordinating himself and his sons—his inheritance—under the God of Israel. He did not do so as a circumcised Israelite, but as a man who wanted the prayers of Israelites. He was not petitioning as a would-be equal, but as a humble servant of Israel's God. The Jews had no objection.

Publicly, neither did the Samaritans.

Conclusion

This incident illustrates a fundamental biblical principle: the rejection of syncretism. *He who is not under the covenant's laws by oath is not to become a joint participant*. He may kneel before God as a supplicant.

He may not be kneeled to as a covenantal representative of God's ecclesiastical covenant.

The Samaritan leaders said that "we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him." They were like a person who is trying to get into a military base's strategic planning center, but without either a uniform or papers. The person may insist that he is a big supporter of the military. The guard must not let him into the secured area. He is not under official authority, so he is not allowed to make official decisions. He is allowed to attend a parade. He is not entitled to plan one.

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FREEWILL OFFERINGS BY PERSIAN RULERS

> *Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.*
>
> EZRA 7:14–18

The theocentric principle is subordination to God through voluntary sacrifice.

A. Religious Liberty

In the seventh year of his reign (v. 7), Darius/Artaxerxes sent Ezra the scribe, Levites, and priests to Jerusalem. They went of their own accord (v. 13). This was at least six years after the exchange of letters regarding the rebuilding of the temple. That dispute had begun in his first year (4:6).

Cyrus conquered Babylon around 538 B.C. He immediately authorized the Jews' return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). He died in 530 B.C. Darius the Great came to power in 522. So, the dispute began about 16 years after Cyrus authorized the return to Jerusalem. Then it was at least another six years until Ezra returned to Jerusalem (7:7).

The king and his advisors sent silver and gold with Ezra. They

trusted him to use it for the purpose of sacrifice. The king and his counselors were submitting to the authority of Israel's God as non-members of the covenant. They were subordinating themselves to God, but not by means of a covenant oath. They were not placing themselves under the Mosaic law, but they were promoting that law-order for the Israelites. The king's decree identified Ezra as "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (v. 12). He even exempted them from taxation. "Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them" (v. 24).

He placed Ezra over the people as a civil ruler—an agent of the king. "And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not" (v. 25). That is, he authorized the Mosaic law as the civil law of this province. He placed civil sanctions in Ezra's hand. "And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment" (v. 26).

This was extraordinary. Persia allowed the Jews to govern themselves by means of God's law. Jews possessed religious liberty. In contrast, the Greeks at this time were divided into city-states, each with its own gods and its own laws. These cities were at war with each other constantly. There was no freedom of religion there for citizens as Greeks. Every citizen had to be a member of the city's religious cult. There was no religious pluralism in Greece: freedom of religion under a single legal order. There was no central government.

Western historians cheer the Greeks in the Persian wars (498–444 B.C.). The Persians are seen as the evil, tyrannical invaders. Yet it was the Persians, not the classical Greeks, who established religious freedom.

B. Covenant-Breakers' Donations

The rulers of Persia were covenant-breakers. They were outside the kingdom of God. They had no inheritance in this kingdom. But they possessed great power. The people of God were under their jurisdiction.

The rulers had three covenantal options: (1) formally covenant with the God of the Bible through circumcision and obedience to

God's revealed laws; (2) remain outside the covenant, but publicly support the work of God's kingdom; (3) remain outside the covenant and persecute the people of God. Initially, Nebuchadnezzar did the third. Then he repented (Dan. 4). He did the second. Darius the Mede (Cyrus) and Darius the Great did the second. They made freewill offerings to the kingdom of God by supporting the building of the temple and offering animal sacrifices. The cost of building the temple was reduced because of this.

The question arises: Was there a hidden cost of these offerings? Did the kings exercise greater authority over the church/priesthood because of these gifts? The texts do not indicate that this was the case. The temple cost the Jews less to build than would otherwise have been the case. But the sacrifices were part of a system of sacrifice that did not benefit the nation directly. The priests had more meat to eat, but they also had more work to perform. There was an occasional advantage for the priests, but the only advantage for the public would have been if the priests sold this post-sacrificial meat to the general public. There was no authorization for this in the Mosaic law. "And that which is left of the meat offering shall be Aaron's and his sons': it is a thing most holy of the offerings of the LORD made by fire" (Lev. 2:10). "And all the meat offering that is baken in the oven, and all that is dressed in the fryingpan, and in the pan, shall be the priest's that offereth it" (Lev. 7:9).

Covenant-breakers could give to God through gifts to the temple or the priesthood. This gained them no permanent advantage institutionally. It did reveal publicly that the covenant-breakers did acknowledge some degree of sovereignty for God. God was at least entitled to be part of the pantheon of civic gods in the empire.

Conclusion

Darius and his top advisors donated gold and silver to the temple. They also provided animals to sacrifice on their behalf. This was not an attempt to gain civil power over the Jews. The king already possessed such power. The gifts were formal acts of personal subordination to God. This subordination was not covenantal. It was personal. They were not placing themselves under the laws of God. They were funding the ecclesiastical order that placed the Jews under the Mosaic law.

Ezra rejoiced:

> Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me (Ezra 7:27–28).

As it turned out, the Jews delayed rebuilding the city's wall for another 13 years (Neh. 2:1–5). It was the temple, not the wall, that had been foremost in their thinking.

CONCLUSION TO EZRA

And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.

EZRA 10:2–3

Separation of covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers was mandatory to avoid syncretism, defined as a mixture of confessions about God within a single oath-bound covenantal institution. The Jewish leaders had rejected the Samaritans' request that they be allowed to participate in the building of the temple. But what about the syncretism of their families? Could that lawfully continue?

This passage indicates that the men of Israel also ended their mixed marriages through permanent separation. This included the children of these marriages. They did this for the sake of God's covenant. They cast out these covenant-breakers from their midst, just as Abraham had cast out Hagar and Ishmael. The temple was now finished. They would not bring their covenant-breaking family members into the temple's grounds. This is the background for Jesus' warning: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). One implication of this declaration is the refutation of one of secular conservatism's most widely believed assertions, namely, that the family is the most important human institution. It is not. *The institutional church is the most important human institution*. The family will not extend into eternity.[1] The church will.

1. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage,

Ezra oversaw the construction of the temple. The animal sacrifices could now be restored. The separation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers ecclesiastically now had a physical representation: the temple's walls. The Ark of the Covenant was gone, but the symbolic separation of the holy of holies still stood: the veil of the temple.[2] This representation then led to the separation of family members from heads of households. At this point, both church and family manifested the division established by covenant. What now needed to be separated representatively was the civil government. This separation could not be accomplished until the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt, including the gates. That was the next step in the restoration process. That is the subject of the Book of Nehemiah.

but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:29–30).

2. "And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mark 15:37–38).

INTRODUCTION TO NEHEMIAH

These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city.

NEHEMIAH 7:6

The comparative handful of returnees[1] went back at first to Judah and Jerusalem: the southern kingdom. Those whose forebears had come from cities in the southern kingdom returned there. The others returned to their cities. "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities" (Ezra 2:70).

They did not occupy their families' rural plots. They could not. The Persian king had to deal with immigrants from other nations: Samaritans. They had been brought in by the Babylonians to occupy the nearly empty land. The original land distribution of the conquest generation was not restored. This changed the pattern of rural inheritance. The jubilee law had probably not been enforced. After the return, it could not be enforced. The Jews did not possess the legal authority to dispossess the strangers. Ezekiel had announced this at the time of the captivity.

> So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger

1. "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women" (Ezra 2:64–65; cf. Neh. 7:66–67).

> sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord God (Ezek. 47:21–23).[2]

That was the legal requirement, according to the revised Mosaic law. The returnees did not possess the authority to enforce this. Most probably dwelt in their home cities. In walled cities, the jubilee inheritance laws never applied.

> And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubile (Lev. 25:29–30).

The returnees would intermix geographically with Samaritans, who now lived where their forefathers had lived. They headed initially into cities.

Jerusalem was the central city because it was where the temple was. Nehemiah recognized that this city required a wall of separation between the temple and the covenant-breaking residents of the land. He devoted himself to seeing to it that the wall surrounding Jerusalem was rebuilt and maintained. This was 36 years after the Jews had returned to Jerusalem from the former Babylonian empire. They returned from the region of the Euphrates River.

The Book of Nehemiah is about rebuilding Jerusalem's wall.

2. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 23.

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A WALL OF COVENANTAL SEPARATION

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

NEHEMIAH 1:3

The theocentric focus of this passage is the residence of God in Israel. He resided inside the temple, which was His house. There were physical barriers around the sacrifices of the temple: the temple's walls. Another barrier was civil as well as ecclesiastical: the city's wall.

A. The Covenant's Sanctions

Nehemiah says that he was the cupbearer to the king (Neh. 1:11). His task was be sure that no one poisoned the king's drink. Generally, a cupbearer drank from the same source of wine that the king would be served. If it was poisoned, he would die. He then made sure that there was no intermediary between him and king. His was a life-and-death office. It mandated daily contact with the king.

When he learned that the wall was still in ruins, he prayed to God. He prayed as a representative of the people, confessing their sins on their behalf (Neh. 1:5–9). He reminded God of His covenant. "And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments" (v. 5). Nehemiah's prayer was representative.

> Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of

> Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned (v. 6).

He was not a Levite or a priest. He was not a prophet. He was an official in the king's service. The king was in authority over the Jews. He therefore was in a position to help the Jews who resided in Jerusalem. As an agent in a position to help, Nehemiah prayed on their behalf.

First, he reminded God that he knew that the Mosaic law had warned the people that they would be scattered if they refused to obey the law.

> And it shall come to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind (Deut. 28:63–65).

Nehemiah was aware that the people of Israel were still under covenantal sanctions. They were under judgment.

Second, He reminded God of His promise of deliverance. He cited Deuteronomy 30:1–3: "But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there" (Neh. 1:9).

Third, he prayed to God to be able to use his position to complete the work of reconciliation between Israel and God. "O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer" (v. 11). That work of reconciliation was incomplete because the wall of Jerusalem was incomplete.

His judicial position was analogous to what Esther's had been when the Jews were threatened by Haman. She could intercede on their behalf. That had taken place approximately eight years earlier, in the twelfth year of Darius' reign (Est. 3:7). It was now year 20 (Neh. 1:1; 2:1).

B. The Authority to Exclude

The king perceived that something troubled Nehemiah (Neh. 2:2). Nehemiah explained. "And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" (v. 3). The king granted him authority to return to Jerusalem and repair the wall. Then Nehemiah asked for more.

> Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me (Neh. 2:7–8).

When you are acting on behalf of God's people, ask for more if you think you can get more.

The king possessed capital. Nehemiah asked for a portion of this capital. On what grounds? Because a city that had no wall in the ancient Near East was not a place of honor. It was an insecure place that could not defend itself.

Nehemiah was not asking for a wall so as to resist the king. Such resistance would have been suicidal. A king who could build up a wall could surely break down the wall. The wall was to secure the city against other enemies. Those enemies were also under the authority of the king.

Shortly after Nehemiah handed the king's official papers to local officials, those enemies were alerted to the threat to their authority. "Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel" (Neh. 2:9–10). This was envy: the desire to tear down someone else. The same sin in the enemies of the Jews had hampered Zerubabbel in the construction of the temple 36 years earlier.[1]

Nehemiah inspected the wall at night (vv. 12–13). He found the wall in ruins (v. 13). He did not initially tell the local Jews of his

1. Cyrus conquered Babylon around 538 B.C. Jews returned to Jerusalem the next year. Local resistance began immediately (Ezra 4). Darius the Great became king in 522: 16 years after Cyrus conquered Babylon. Now it was 20 years after Darius became king.

plan to rebuild the wall (v. 16). Then he did tell them. He cited the king's words and commands. Word spread fast. "But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?" (v. 19) They accused him of what they would have done, if they had possessed a secure wall: treason. Nehemiah understood what they feared losing: easy access into the city. "Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem" (v. 20). This was the same answer that Zerubabbel had given the non-Jews of his day. "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us" (Ezra 4:3).[2] Nehemiah extended the boundary of covenantal exclusion from the temple to the city itself. Both boundaries were to be marked by walls in good repair.

The wall began to be repaired, family by family, section by section. It was a joint effort (Neh. 3).

Their enemies saw what this meant: exclusion. They resented this.

> But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? (Neh. 4:1–2)

They began making preparations to take the city by force (v. 8). This, despite the fact that Nehemiah had been authorized by the king to re-build the wall. It was clear who was in rebellion to the king. They would rebel against him by destroying those whom the king had authorized to exclude them (v. 11). In response, Nehemiah told the Jews to arm themselves and be ready to fight. This meant that they would resist rebellion against the king. He did not appeal to the masses alone. He appealed to the rulers. "And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and

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2. Chapter 35.

terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (Neh. 4:14). This was not revolution. It was counter-revolution. They became an armed camp. The men did not take off their clothes except to wash (v. 23).

Conclusion

Nehemiah understood the covenantal implications of a city without a wall. It could not defend itself from infiltration by covenant-breakers. In the ancient world, it took a wall to establish a city's civil covenant. The wall could be defended.

The Book of Nehemiah is about the defense of the city. The defense was covenantal, not military. The city would be a place where God's laws would be enforced. Those excluded from the city would be covenant-breakers residing in the land and unwilling to submit to the city's laws.

The city's wall would add an extra boundary around the temple. These Samaritans were inside the original national boundary. They would no longer have 24-hour access to the city where the temple resided, except on terms established by Jews.

38

DEBT SERVITUDE

Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

NEHEMIAH 5:3–5

The theocentric principle here is God's forgiveness. The sin here was usury.

> And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer (Neh. 5:6–8).

A. The Charity Loan

The Hebrew word translated here as "usury" does not mean a high rate of interest. It means *any* rate of interest charged to a *poor Hebrew* seeking a *charity loan*. All three defining features had to be present in order for a loan to be usurious.

First, the person had to be poor. "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" (Ex. 22:25).[1] Second, he had

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas,

to be a covenant-keeper. That meant a fellow Hebrew. It was lawful to lend to a stranger. "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger [*nokree*][2] thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deut. 23:19–20).[3]

The charity loan was under the law that governed the sabbatical year. "At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release" (Deut. 15:1–2).[4] This was specifically a zero-interest loan. This law did not apply to a foreigner. "Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it" (Deut. 15:3–4).

This law went beyond merely not charging interest. It was a moral obligation to make the loan.

> If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt

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Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 3, *Tools of Dominion* (1990), ch. 49.

2. An uncircumcised temporary resident.

3. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 57.

4. *Ibid*., ch. 36.

> furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day (Deut. 15:7–15).

This was a unique law in the ancient Near East. It was a morally mandatory form of charity. The man who had money to lend was morally required to lend it at zero interest for up to seven years. If a debtor could not repay, he could lawfully be enslaved by the creditor. That was why there were rules regarding the end of the term of service. The creditor also owed him capital to get started again.

What about collateral? The assumption was that he had little of value. "When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God" (Deut. 24:10–13).[5]

The lender had a right to this collateral, but not if it kept the person warm at night. "If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious" (Ex. 22:26–27). Then of what use was the collateral to the lender? It was a lot of extra trouble: delivering it back at night. This was a restriction on borrowing. The borrower got the use of the item when he needed it, but he could use it to secure only one loan. This prohibited multiple indebtedness.[6]

B. The Sin of the Nation

Nehemiah was angry because the rich in the land had used their wealth to oppress poor brethren. These were not people who had borrowed money for a business venture that had failed. Some had borrowed because of a food shortage. "Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth" (Neh. 5:3). Others had borrowed to

5. *Ibid.*, ch. 60.
6. North, *Authority and Dominion*, ch. 49.

pay tribute to the king (v. 4). They had to offer their children's services as collateral. "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards" (v. 5). These were emergency loans. They were not modern consumer loans, which enable people to live in comfort beyond their means.

The rich had used their wealth to bring Hebrews under bondage. They did this through debt bondage. This had been prohibited by the Mosaic law. Why? Because it promoted the kind of bondage that the Egyptians had imposed on them. "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day" (Deut. 15:15). Nehemiah challenged the rich.

> Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise (Neh. 5:11–13).

This repentance indicated that they had learned their lesson during the captivity. God had told Jeremiah that the city would be captured and burned by Nebuchadnezzar. But King Zedekiah would not have to die (Jer. 34:1–3). There was a way out. The king took it.

> This is the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.
>
> Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let them go. But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

> Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: But ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids.

The rulers then reversed themselves. They refused to suffer the loss of bondservants. This doomed them.

> Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth (Jer. 34:8–20).[7]

The Jews of Nehemiah's day had repeated this sin. Upon hearing from him that it was a sin, they repented. They let their Hebrew servants go free. This marked a change of heart. They listened to a voice of authority. Nehemiah was that voice of authority—civil authority. He followed his own advice.

> Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare

7. Gary North, *Restoration and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Prophets* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 20.

> rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God (Neh. 5:14–15).

The text does not say how he financed this enormous expense. He must have been a rich man who owned productive assets. If this was not the case, then the king paid for his services out of his own funds. Nehemiah did not abuse his authority. He did not enslave his people during his dozen years in high office. "Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people" (v. 18). He did not add to their bondage.

Conclusion

Nehemiah governed by lawful delegated authority. He governed in terms of the Mosaic law. The people conformed to the Mosaic law because of his moral authority. He practiced what he preached.

Covenant-keepers are not to use their wealth as a means of enslaving their covenantal brethren. They are to have an open hand. They are not to subsidize sloth or riotous living, but they are to lend a helping hand to those in need. The people of Jerusalem had violated this law, as their forefathers had. But when called to account, they repented. They did not go back on their righteous action.

39

THE FINAL STAGE OF A PROJECT

Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.

NEHEMIAH 6:1–2

The theocentric principle here is the supreme importance of finishing a project. An uncompleted project testifies to a false task or a false God.

> And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62).[1]

> Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope (I Cor. 9:10).[2]

A. Finishing the Wall

When he heard about the wall of Jerusalem being in ruins, Nehemiah decided that his task in life was to see to it that the wall was rebuilt. He forfeited his job as the king's cupbearer. He forfeited his position at court. He journeyed far to Jerusalem. He oversaw the project. He was determined not to be thwarted.

1. Gary North, *Treasure and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Luke*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2000] 2012), ch. 20.

2. Gary North, *Judgment and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on First Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [2001] 2012), ch. 11.

He had opponents. The heathen (*goyim*) were only part of this opposition, as he would soon learn. There were nobles who did not want the work completed. They were in league with the covenant-breakers.

Putting up the gates was the final stage of the project. As soon as it became clear that the final stage of the project was imminent, the opponents redoubled their efforts to stop it. They offered to meet with Nehemiah in private. He refused. They repeated their offer four times (vv. 2–4). He refused all four times. Then they sent a messenger.

> Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together (Neh. 6:5–7).

This was blackmail. They were warning him that they would go public with this accusatory letter if he did not cooperate. This was futile on their part. He had the trust of the king. But they were desperate. He replied that they were liars. "Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart" (Neh. 6:8).

The enemies of God wrote the open letter as if Nehemiah were plotting rebellion. This had been the strategy of the critics of the temple almost four decades earlier (Ezra 4:5–6).[3] They had imputed evil political motives to those who wanted to establish physical boundaries around the sacrifices. Their spiritual heirs repeated the strategy.

The next step was a threat of violence. It was delivered by a seeming ally: a false prophet.

> Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me (Neh. 6:10–13).

3. Chapter 34.

Nehemiah prayed to God. "My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear" (v. 14).

His opponents were escalating their resistance. Why? Because the closer the day of reckoning approached—the installation of the gates—the closer they were to a loss of influence.

The wall was a sieve without the gates. It could not serve as a way to lock out covenant-breakers. Freedom of entry was normal, but when the rulers inside the city decided to close the gates, they could control who entered and departed. The gates were the means of control. Without the gates, the rulers inside the city would have far less influence. The gates were the means of imposing negative sanctions: blocked entry. The wall was the means of judicial control. This was why the elders of a walled city sat at the gates. The gates were the symbol of judicial sanctions, because they really were the means of final control. The wall funneled traffic to the gates. The gates were the final step in the process of screening a city.

B. The Finished Work

"So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days" (Neh. 6:15). This was rapid work. By placing families in charge of specific sections of the wall, Nehemiah took advantage of the division of labor. He and his staff could assess the daily progress of each team. They could also compare their progress with that of other families.

The wall had been in ruins since the Jews' return from Babylon under Cyrus 36 years earlier. After the people had begun work on the temple, they stopped. They had started again under Darius. They had not completed the second boundary: the wall. This boundary was not a physical boundary to protect the temple from physical attack. The Persian kings were the protectors of the temple. The wall provided a boundary of judicial protection. Covenant-breakers would not gain easy and automatic access to residents of the city who shared their commitment theologically and culturally. This included some of the rulers of the city.

> Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son

> of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear (Neh. 6:17–19).

The gates could now be closed. This would take place later, when Nehemiah saw that covenant-breaking merchants were buying and selling on the sabbath. He closed the gates. He threatened them with civil action if they continued this practice (Neh. 13:15–22).[4]

The wall of the city reinforced the enforcement of the Mosaic law inside the nation's central city. This increased the influence of the Mosaic law outside the city, but inside the national boundaries.

C. The Unequal Value of Parts of a Project

The completion of the wall of the city required the completion of the gates. This was the crucial final step. The project's goal would be incomplete if the gates were not completed.

This reveals an economic principle. As a project nears completion, the final step becomes more valuable. The previous costs of an incomplete project are of zero value, or close to it, if the project is not completed. For example, if the estimated payoff of a project is 2,000 ounces of gold, and the cost of the project is 1,000 ounces of gold, and 900 ounces have been spent, the value of the final step is 2,000 ounces of gold. What has already been spent is irrelevant as far as the final value is concerned. It is gone. This is called a *sunk cost*.

Consider the cost of building a highway between two cities. The contract to buy the land to build the highway must include all owners of land between the two cities. If the highway builders bought all of the land except one parcel, the owner of that parcel could continue to increase the price of his land as the highway neared completion. The economic value of that final parcel would approach the value cost of building a bypass.

Eminent domain is the legal power of a civil government to buy a piece of property, despite the owner's refusal to sell. The reason why civil governments assert the right of eminent domain is because of this phenomenon of the final parcel. By using compulsion, the planners can overcome the ability of one holdout to increase the value of his parcel, knowing that the value of his parcel approaches the value of the entire project, if all the others agree to sell. Because numerous participants understand this, the costs of negotiating the sale of all

4. Chapter 41.

parcels increases. They are not looking at the value of their properties today. Each of them is looking at his parcel in terms of what it would be worth if the project were close to completion. The cost of negotiation can get so high that the project cannot be arranged. The benefits that it might have provided are lost. The government lowers this cost by declaring the right of eminent domain. But this involves the surrender of ownership. There are costs associated with such a surrender. They are impossible to calculate.

So, the goal of reducing the more measurable costs of an immediate project tends to take precedence over the costs imposed by a loss of property rights. The cost that gains attention is more immediate and direct. The cost of the loss of ownership is distant in time, as well as a matter of economic theory rather than immediate practice. The value of the *thing unseen* does not register with most people.

If economic value is strictly individual and subjective, as modern economics teaches, then there is no economic value for unperceived benefits. If today's decision-makers ignore the cost of lost freedoms, then there are no costs of lost freedoms, if individual subjective value is all the value there is. People's present-orientation will generally triumph over long-term principles of economics.

To overcome this tendency, the Bible lays down basic laws of ownership. God is the supreme individual imputer of value. He has written His laws accordingly. In Mosaic Israel, the king could not lawfully confiscate the family property of a common man. This was basic to the inheritance laws. The family inheritance laws of the jubilee year did not apply inside walled cities.[5] Nevertheless, David paid the owner of land in Jerusalem on which David planned to build an altar, even though the owner offered to give it away. "And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost" (I Chron. 21:24).

Conclusion

As the completion of the wall approached, the opponents increased their efforts to sabotage the project. When the installation of the gates

5. "And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubilee" (Lev. 25:29–30).

was all that remained, the opponents became frantic. They escalated their efforts in order to stop the final step.

There was economic logic to their opposition. The value of the wall was dependent on the gates. The value of establishing a covenantal defence of the city, meaning the enforcement of God's civil laws, was dependent on the gates. The opponents of the Mosaic law understood this. They resorted to tricks, then threats, then slander in order to stop the installation of the gates.

Gates in the West disappeared during the Renaissance because gunpowder made walls obsolete as military defenses. Cultural gates were partially overcome in the same era by the printing press and movable type. Finally, the Internet breached the last of the cultural gates. Individual self-government is the only defense today.

40

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pounds of silver. And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pounds of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments.

NEHEMIAH 7:71–72

The theocentric principle here is economic inequality. Inequality is inherent in God's creation. This includes mankind. It also include's a society's distribution of wealth.

A. Rich Men's Donations

The richest men in Israel gave a large sum of money to pay for the work. The text does not identify this work. Presumably, it was related to the temple. The wall had already been rebuilt.

In Ezra, we read of the donations by wealthy Jews to the building of the temple. "And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments" (Ezra 2:68–69).

Nehemiah also records an offering. The amount of gold is different from the amount mentioned by Ezra. This had to be a different offering in Nehemiah's day. In this case, the donations of the common people as a whole were about equal to the donations by the wealthy few. The two groups of donations were very close: 200 pounds of silver less from the commoners, but offset by one hundred garments for

priests. The numbers are too close to be random. I suspect that there was open bidding, or some sort of feedback through an intermediary. "Will you match this? You don't want them to donate more, do you?"

B. Pareto's Law

In 1897, the Italy-born Swiss professor of economics Vilfredo Pareto published his discovery that in every European nation he studied, about 20% of the population owned about 80% of the wealth.[1] This insight has subsequently been found to apply to a wide range of operations, even including earthquake damage. About 20% of a firm's customers provides 80% of the firm's profit. About 20% of the bugs in Microsoft's software produces 80% of the crashes and major failures.[2] About 20% of public-access facilities contribute about 80% of the crime.[3] It could be said that 80% of the hand's functions are the result of 20% of the digits: the thumb.

There is no known cause of this phenomenon. So, there is no known cure, if a cure is needed. In every known society, irrespective of its economic structure or its operating legal principles, something close to a 20–80 wealth distribution occurs. No political reform or other reform has changed this distribution. This frustrates socialists, who believe that the state can and should equalize wealth. It also frustrates free market economists, who believe that market competition can and should equalize wealth. So, both groups refuse to discuss the Pareto law in detail. It is easier to ignore it.

This passage indicates that an inequality of wealth existed in Nehemiah's day. A small number of Jews provided half of the donations. We know that the 20–80 distribution occurs all the way up the pyramid of wealth. If we take 20% of 20%, we get 4%. If we take 80% of 80%, we get 64%. About 4% of the population owns 64% of the wealth. So, using a Pareto distribution, we can guess that the families that contributed half of the donations constituted approximately 3% of the population.

Conclusion

The richest members of the Israelite community donated half of the gold and silver used for this work, whatever the work was. It is likely

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1. Vilfredo Pareto, *Cours d'economic politique* (1897), vol. 2.

2. Paula Rooney, "Microsoft's CEO: 80–20 Rule Applied to Bugs, Not Just Features," *Channel Web* (Oct. 3, 2002).

3. Ronald V. Clarke and John E. Eck, *Understanding Risky Facilities* (Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, 2007), pp. 4–8.

that they constituted about 3% of the population. A fundamental inequality of wealth existed in post-exilic Israel some 36 years after their return from Babylon.

The Bible nowhere indicates that there will ever be or should ever be equality of wealth in society. Paul used the word equality in his fund-raising letter to the Corinth church. "But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality" (II Cor. 8:14).[4] But he used the same term in his advice to slave owners: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven" (Col. 4:1). He did not say to free the slaves. He told them to be just. A fundamental inequality would remain: master and servant. He was not talking about equal wealth or status. He was talking about justice: to render unto all according to their productivity and also their need in temporary hard times.

4. Gary North, *Ethics and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on the Epistles* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), ch. 6.

41

A BUSINESS-FREE SABBATH

And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord *our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes; And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.*

NEHEMIAH 10:28–31

The theocentric principle here is the fourth commandment.

> Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex 20:9–11).[1]

This included the principle of the sabbatical year.

> At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the Lord's release. Of a foreigner thou mayest

1. Gary North, *Authority and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Exodus* (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, 2012), Part 2, *Decalogue and Dominion* (1986), ch. 25.

> exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day (Deut 15:1–5).[2]

The nation took a corporate oath regarding the sabbath. This was an act of covenant renewal.

A. Profaning the Sabbath

The final section of the Book of Nehemiah provides an account of a violation of the sabbath and the response of Nehemiah, the governor.

> In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath (Neh. 13:15–18).

Nehemiah, in his office as governor (*Tirshatha*), brought the first stage of a covenant lawsuit against the rulers of the nation. He did not go to the people. He did not go to the Samaritans. Yet these were the people who were violating the sabbath law: buyers and sellers. Instead, he went to the nobles, who represented the people.

Having brought this lawsuit against them, he took action.

> And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath (Neh. 13:19–21).

2. Gary North, *Inheritance and Dominion: An Economic Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, Georgia: Point Five Press, [1999] 2012), ch. 36.

He was the governor. This was a civil action against voluntary economic transactions. On what legal grounds did he do this? First, on the basis of the Mosaic law. Second, on the basis of the Mosaic law's promised negative sanctions: captivity. "Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath" (v. 18). Trade on the sabbath was not a victimless crime. The state had to intercede in order to keep God's negative sanctions at bay. Third, because of the nation's act of corporate covenant renewal. "And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt (Neh. 10:31).

He then replaced his servants with Levites. It was their job to police the sabbath, with the civil government backing them up. "And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy" (v. 22).

This involved mixing church and state. This mixture had always existed under the Mosaic law. The priests and Levites had always served as counsellors to civil judges.

> If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, and between stroke and stroke, being matters of controversy within thy gates: then shalt thou arise, and get thee up into the place which the Lord thy God shall choose; And thou shalt come unto **the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days,** and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment: And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the Lord shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee: According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. And the man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto the priest that standeth to minister there before the Lord thy God, or unto the judge, even that man shall die: and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously (Deut 17:8–13).

> One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. If a false witness rise

> up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong; Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the Lord, **before the priests and the judges**, which shall be in those days; And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you (Deut. 19:15–20).[3]

Conclusion

The civil government, in association with the Levites, policed the gates on the sabbath. The wall and the gates served as barriers to entry. They served as a means of separation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers.

The decision of Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem culminated in his act as governor to separate buyers from sellers on the sabbath. Without the wall, this would have been far more expensive to enforce. The wall was not to separate Israel from Persia. That judicial connection was maintained in the person of Nehemiah. It was Persian authority, under the Mosaic law, that made possible the separation of buyers and sellers.

The fears of the Samaritans and other opponents of God's law had been justified. They feared that the enforcement of the Mosaic law would undermine their local authority and wealth. The temple and the wall were threats to them.

3. North, *Inheritance and Dominion*, ch. 45.

CONCLUSION TO NEHEMIAH

> *In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?*
>
> NEHEMIAH 13:23–27

The Jews were at it again. Ezra had ended his book with an account of the national oath to put away covenant-breaking wives and children (Ezra 10:10–19).[1] This commitment had not lasted more than a few years. The covenantal separation within the families no longer existed.

Nehemiah was not in a position to break up the families of the common people. But, for the sake of the integrity of the sacrificial system, he broke up the families of the Levites and priests.

> And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business (Neh. 13:28–30).

There is no question that, in the Persian empire, he possessed the authority to do this as governor. There is also no doubt that he pos-

1. Conclusion to Ezra.

sessed God-authorized authority over the priesthood. He exercised this authority in the name of God. He would not allow syncretism inside the families of those who offered sacrifice on behalf of the Jews and also on behalf of the rulers of Persia, who had funded the rebuilding of the wall. Maintaining the confessional and covenantal integrity of the priesthood was more important than any theoretical separation of church and state. It was also more important than maintaining the marriage covenants in question. There had to be walls of separation between covenant-keepers and covenant-breakers. Syncretism was not an option for the Levites. There is no indication anywhere in the Bible that Nehemiah did the wrong thing.

CONCLUSION TO THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

> *The* L*ORD* *our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the* L*ORD* *sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.*
>
> DEUTERONOMY 1:6–8

The books that make up the historical books of the Old Testament tell the story of Israel's unwillingness to conquer the land of Canaan and the land all the way to the Euphrates. They tell of Israel's adoption of the gods of the land. They tell of God's repeated deliverance of the nation into bondage to enemy nations surrounding them. Then came captivity: Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. The people were carried off to the Euphrates as captives, not conquerors.

Their economic lessons were many, but they all boiled down to this: the fulfillment of the promises of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, meaning the predictability of corporate sanctions. When they obeyed the Mosaic law, they prospered. When they disobeyed, they did not. Mostly, they disobeyed.

The historical books from Isaiah's day to Malachi's should be read in association with the prophetic books. The prophets came to the people with warnings. The historical books provide information regarding the fulfillment of these warnings.

A. Basic Themes

The Book of Joshua begins with the story of God's recapitulation of what He had told Moses.

> Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:6–9).

Joshua was strong and courageous; the Israelites were not. He had confidence in God's sanctions; the Israelites did not.[1] They did not conquer all of Canaan. They allowed some of the Canaanites to remain in the land.

The conquest was preceded by covenant renewal: national circumcision. The daily manna ended when they crossed the Jordan River. From that time on, they had to live by conquest and then by productivity.[2] The supernatural subsidies from God ended.

Jericho was the first city to fall. Only Rahab and her family survived. This conquest was to be total: God alone would collect the spoils. This meant the disinheritance of Jericho.[3] But Achan stole valuable things: a representative sin for which 36 Israelite warriors paid with their lives at Ai.[4] For this, Achan's family came under the same total ban that God had applied to Jericho.[5]

Israel did not collect its promised inheritance. It did not extend its conquest all the way to the Euphrates.[6]

The issue of inheritance is the central issue of the story of Jephthah's daughter. She was not sacrificed as a literal burnt offering. She was put up for adoption into the tribe of Levi, cut off from any inheritance in her father's household.[7]

Adoption and inheritance are the central themes of the Book of Ruth. Ruth was adopted by marriage into the family of Elimelech. After her husband died, she was adopted into Boaz's family line by

1. Chapter 1.
2. Chapter 2.
3. Chapter 3.
4. Chapter 4.
5. Chapter 5.
6. Chapter 6.
7. Chapter 7.

marriage, for he became her kinsman redeemer. Through Boaz's commitment to her and to Elimelech's family name, he extended the promised covenant line. His branch of the family had originated through another adoption by marriage, when Salmon married Rahab (Ruth 4:21–22).[8]

The ministry of Samuel, who was both prophet and judge, was based on God's intervention into history. His birth was an answer to his mother's prayer and a priest's blessing. She sang a song in response: God intervenes in history, overturning the prevailing social order.[9] God later brought sanctions against the nation for the sake of Eli's evil sons. He next brought sanctions against the cities of Philistia for the sake of the Ark of the Covenant. God, not chance, was the source of the sanctions.[10]

Samuel warned Israel against the tax tyranny to come under kings, but the people did not care. They wanted to go to war behind a king.[11] They got their wish, again and again until the captivity. There was a brief time of peace and prosperity under Solomon, whose wisdom led to increased national wealth. He had good judgment regarding the disputes of others.[12] He had poor judgment in his personal life. The nation gained wealth through trade. The kingdom of God profited through this increase in wealth.[13] Solomon built the temple, where God resided.[14] But Solomon broke the Mosaic laws of kingship (Deut. 17). He centralized political power. His son Rehoboam lost the kingdom. This break-up decentralized political power.[15] Rehoboam had threatened to impose high taxes. The resulting tax revolt divided the nation.[16] It never came together again under Israelite kings.

Ahab was a wicked king who centralized power. Elijah challenged him and his pagan religion. Ahab later stole Naboth's inheritance. For this, he and his heirs lost their inheritance.[17] This remained the pattern for the kings of Israel and Judah. The evil done by a king brought negative sanctions on the nation. The kings represented the people. The people were contented with this arrangement, which

8. Chapters 8–11.
9. Chapter 12.
10. Chapter 13.
11. Chapter 14.
12. Chapter 15.
13. Chapter 16.
14. Chapter 18.
15. Chapter 19.
16. Chapter 20.
17. Chapter 22.

their forefathers had demanded under Samuel. When the kings were evil, the people suffered from negative sanctions. The sanctions of God were predictable.[18] The people never really believed this. Neither did most of the kings.

They learned during the captivity that they had to trust God for deliverance. Deliverance came, but only a handful of Jews took advantage of it initially: under 50,000. This time, they were more careful about not sharing authority with strangers. They paid for the rebuilding of the temple. Outsiders were not allowed to participate.[19] They had to battle against these rejected outsiders to finish both the temple and Jerusalem's wall. When the gates of the city were finally completed after 36 years,[20] the governor could enforce the law against business activities on the sabbath.[21]

The book of Esther does not mention God. It also does not offer any economic information. But it offers this message: the Jews as a people were protected. An individual Jew or a family line was not.

> Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esth. 4:13–14)

B. Economic Insights

The historical books present a number of insights governing economic theory. The fundamental insight is that inheritance assumes disinheritance.[22] The Promised Land was the Surrendered Land for the Canaanites. In addition,

> A welfare economy is a slaves' economy.[23]

> Gleaning was a good way to bring hard-working poor people to the attention of productive people with land.[24]

> Circumstances change, and there can be great reversals of wealth.[25]

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18. Chapter 31.
19. Chapter 35.
20. Chapter 39.
21. Chapter 41.
22. Chapter 1.
23. Chapter 2.
24. Chapter 9.
25. Chapter 12.

> High taxes can lead to political resistance.[26]
>
> A creditor in Israel had a right to the labor of a defaulting debtor's sons until they reached age 20.[27] If you have a lot of wealth, it is a good idea not to show off to those who would like to take it away from you.[28]
>
> If you hire independent contractors, you do not need to get an account from them about how they spent the money you paid to them. On the other hand, if they are hired servants on your payroll, you need to get an account.[29]
>
> Bureaucrats have self-interested agendas that can offset their official agenda of public service.[30]
>
> Sunk costs—money that has been spent and is gone—are not true costs. Money still owed is a real cost.[31]
>
> Debt is a form of servitude.[32]
>
> Economic inequality is as basic to life as all other forms of inequality.[33]

Conclusion

The people of Israel did not obey the Mosaic law. They suffered setbacks as a result. They had been told by Moses that this would happen. They did not act in terms of this warning. For Israel, it was one step forward and two steps back until the captivity. After their remnant's return to the land, it was one step forward and one step back. The final word in the Old Testament is "curse."

> Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5–6).

26. Chapter 20.
27. Chapter 24.
28. Chapter 28.
29. Chapter 29.
30. Chapter 27.
31. Chapter 33.
32. Chapter 38.
33. Chapter 40.